

Chapter 13

'It Makes Us Believe That It Is About Our Freedom': Notes on the Irony of the Learning Apparatus

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13.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reconsider the concepts 'educationalization' and 'the grammar of schooling' (see also Depaepe, 2005) in the light of the overwhelming importance that is ascribed to 'learning' today. Indeed, the word 'learning' has come to be indispensable for speaking about ourselves, others and society. A whole range of human activities, from childrearing, having sex, eating or communication to travelling and using free time, being a citizen and an employee, are regarded as competence based. It is therefore felt that they require a prior learning process. Facing this current emphasis on learning we doubt whether the 'school/education-oriented' concepts of 'educationalization' and 'grammar of schooling', alongside the related historical-analytical perspectives, are still useful when it comes to understanding the present situation. Additionally, we want to indicate that concepts such as 'disciplinary power' and 'panopticism' are no longer adequate to understand what is at stake in so-called 'learning societies' and 'learning environments.' The concept 'learning apparatus' is suggested as an alternative concept to address these issues and maybe as a point of departure for (future) analysis that focuses on the 'grammar of learning.'

The point of departure for our analysis is the critical attitude that Foucault called an 'ontology of the present' (Foucault, 1984a). The main question could be formulated straightforwardly as follows: who are we, as people for whom learning is of major importance and who refer to learning as a way to constantly position and reposition ourselves? In short, learning is conceived as a kind of a 'singular, historical experience' emerging within a particular historical context (Foucault, 1984b, p. 13). Furthermore, it is our aim to analyse how self-understanding and subjectivity emerge within present practices and discourses. For this analysis, we again draw on Foucault and, in particular, his analysis of governmentality and the so-called studies of governmentality developed during the past decades. The aim of these studies is to analyse how a regime of government and self-government works (Foucault, 2004a,

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2004b; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999). The formula ‘governmentalization of learning’ points precisely at what is at stake today and what we would like to describe here: that learning has become a matter of both government and self-government (Delanty, 2003; cf. Edwards, 2002; Edwards & Nicoll, 2004; Fejes, 2005).

In order to describe the governmentalization of learning and the assemblage of a contemporary ‘learning apparatus’, Section 13.2 is a historical excursion that explains how the concept of learning, being disconnected from education and teaching, has been used to refer to a kind of *capital*, to something for which the learner herself is *responsible*, to something that can and should be *managed* (and is an object of expertise) and to something that has to be *employable*.¹ Section 13.3 indicates how these discourses are combined in today’s climate and play a crucial role in advanced liberalism that seeks to promote entrepreneurship. We will explain that entrepreneurship implies an *adaptation ethics* based on self-mobilization through learning, and that advanced liberalism draws upon a kind of *learning apparatus* to secure adaptation for each and all. In the conclusion, we will focus on the mode of power within the learning apparatus and (this is critical) question whether learning does indeed result in the freedom and collective well being that is being promised by advanced liberalism.

13.2 Learning as a Problem/Solution

In order to be able to describe how learning comes to play a major role in the current governmental regime, it is necessary to first draw attention to older forms of problematization in which learning appeared as an important issue for reflection and thought; i.e. the “historically conditioned emergence of new fields of experience” related to learning (Burchell, 1996, p. 31). Hence, we will focus on the emergence of those fields of experience that involve the rationalization of problems as learning problems and regard the enhancement of learning as a solution (Foucault, 1984a, p. 577). It is possible to distinguish four related fields of problem that were shaped in the previous century.

13.2.1 The Capitalization of Learning

At the end of the 1960s there was considerable interest in the development of a so-called knowledge society and knowledge economy. In this economy, knowledge functions as “central capital”, “the crucial means of production” and the “energy of a modern society” (Drucker, 1969, p. xi). It is argued that ‘knowledge workers’ are of major importance in an economy in which many activities imply a ‘knowledge base’. Furthermore, it is argued that these developments require us to look at education in a new way: education (especially universities and research institutions) should be regarded as a ‘knowledge industry’, the main supplier for the new demand for a sufficient ‘knowledge base’ and useful ‘knowledge workers’ (Ibid., p. 313).

Moreover, the logic of the knowledge economy – the logic of the development and technological application of knowledge – becomes the horizon for addressing the importance of ‘continuing education’ for ‘knowledge workers’: “In a knowledge society, school and life can no longer be separate. They have to be linked in an organic process in which the one feeds back on the other. And this continuing education attempts to do” (Drucker, 1969, p. 24). Continuing education is thus regarded as a solution to the need for a useful knowledge base, and economic problems are framed within an educational framework. Furthermore, and this is related to the two other forms of problematization (see below), learning becomes disconnected from its traditional institutional context (school education, training) and conditions (teaching). While schooling and education have, for a long time, been regarded as an economic force, against the background of the knowledge society learning itself is now regarded as a force to produce added value.

More specifically, against this horizon it is possible to address learning as that which links the employee to the process of production. Not just financial, physical and mental stimuli are required to establish this link, but also learning. At this point learning – as the ability to renew one’s knowledge base or human capital – is regarded as a condition for economic development and productivity. In more recent discourses it is argued that for a knowledge worker, “work (. . .) is to a large extent learning” and that “while learning, value is added to the existing human capital” (Tjepkema, 1996, p. 83; Bomers, 1991, p. 5). What is at stake, then, is the ‘capitalization of learning’. In other words, what emerges is a field of experience in which learning appears as a force to produce added value.

13.2.2 Being Responsible Towards Learning

For a second form of problematization we should consider the ideas of lifelong learning (*‘éducation permanente’*) closely related to the concern for self-actualization and self-realization. The basic idea is that learning should not be limited to the school or other traditional educational institutions but should take place at a convenient time in a person’s life. What is needed is an integrated (educational) system or infrastructure that offers opportunities for lifelong learning and prepares “mankind to adapt to change, the predominant characteristic of our time” (Faure et al., 1972, pp. 104, 209). Regarded as self-realization and self-actualization, autonomy here means being able to meet our own needs, and since these needs are changing constantly, lifelong learning is required. Consequently, it is argued that “the central mission of the school will be to teach the pupils to learn, to train them to assimilate new knowledge on their own” (Husén, 1974, p. 23). Apart from this re-conceptualization of the mission of schools, a field of experience emerges in which problems concerning individual well-being can be framed as educational and/or learning problems.

Part of this problematization of learning pertains to the way in which adult education is reflected upon. During the 1920s, Lindeman stressed the importance of

learning for adults and its implication for education: against the background of “education is life” and “the whole of life is learning” it is argued that the situation of the learner should be the point of departure (Lindeman, 1926, pp. 4–5). Later on (and drawing upon humanistic psychology) the idea is that adult learning requires an attitude of self-direction towards learning. Knowles, for example, describes self-directed learning as a process in which the learner takes the initiative (with the help of others if needed) to make a diagnosis of the learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify human and material resources for learning, choose and implement adequate learning strategies and evaluate learning results (Knowles, 1970). Again, in view of the changing society and the need to be able to cope with changes, the importance of self-regulation towards one’s learning is stressed. This could be regarded as ‘responsabilization’ towards learning.

13.2.3 Learning as Object of (Self) Management and (Self) Expertise

Although related to the previous forms of problematization, the new educational and psychological expertise concerning learning processes offers a third form. First, learning is regarded as a kind of cognitive process, that is, a kind of process that is internal to someone who learns and that occurs either incidentally or is planned. Change is a central theme here. Change, it is argued, can be the result of learning processes. This means that to understand these processes and to get a grip on them enables one to influence change (Gagné, 1970). In short, learning as such becomes a domain of expertise. Expertise based on cognitive psychology reflects upon learning in terms of various processes of cognition, which transform information into knowledge (Mayer, 1983). Knowledge, here, is the output of mental processes and as such the result of a ‘construction’ (von Glasersfeld, 1995). The learner is addressed as someone who occupies an environment and social context in which knowledge is constructed on the basis of input (experiences, information, problems, etc.) and where the existing knowledge base is reconstructed in order to bring about a new equilibrium.

Within this field of problematization, where learning is objectified as a process of construction within an environment, it is possible to focus on the abilities of the learner to get a grip on these processes: meta-cognition or knowledge about one’s own cognition and active regulation of one’s own learning processes (Flavell, 1976). The learner is thus someone who can and should become aware of the learning processes and who should relate in an active, regulating way to these processes. Learners should become the ‘managers’ of their own learning, by, for example, developing their own learning strategies, monitoring the process and evaluating the results (Westhoff, 1996, p. 21). In short, the expertise concerning learning presupposes that learners themselves can and should become the real experts (Shuell, 1988). The result of this form of problematization is that learning is reflected upon as a fundamental process for coping with our environment and that the very ‘management’

or 'regulation' of this fundamental process can and should be learned. Thus what is at stake is the emergence of a kind of 'managerial' attitude towards learning; i.e. learning appears as a process of construction that could and should be managed, in the first place, by learners themselves.

13.2.4 Employability of Learning Results

In the early 1990s and against the horizon of the description of the economy as a knowledge economy and of society as a dynamic, permanently changing environment, the problem of employability takes shape. There is a growing concern in relation not only to the actual performance of employees but also (and this level of concern is intensifying) to their 'potential' (as regards their contributions for the future). This potential, which is connected to their 'talents', their learning capacity and their motivation for permanent change, is going to define whether these employees are employable and whether or not they will remain employable. Hence, employability becomes a central issue in the development of active labour policies (Pochet & Paternotre, 1998). In this context the notions of competences and competence management appear. The main idea is that the management of private and public enterprises should no longer concentrate on the management of functions, but of competences as regards the whole of knowledge, capacities and attitudes that are employable. It is argued that raising and maintaining employability, will allow for flexible adaptation to changing conditions and that competence management makes it possible for an enterprise or organization to be dynamic and future oriented. Parallel to these developments, the goal and method of education and training is being recoded in terms of competencies. From a managerial and educational/instructional viewpoint, professional labour, but also life as such, is regarded as a competence-based performance. Hence, with a view towards permanent employability, competence-based and competence-oriented teaching and learning is a major concern.

In this form of problematization the employability of learning is at stake. Competencies refer in fact to the crossing point between learning and the requirement of employability, that is, they represent employable learning results. Employability of learning is not only an issue for the labour market, but also for the learner herself. The lifelong learner today has to ask herself permanently whether she possesses the necessary competencies or 'employable learning results'.

13.3 The Governmentalization of the Learning and the Learning Apparatus

The aim of this section is to demonstrate how the initial forms of problematization identified in the previous section are being combined today and have become part of our present governmental regime that seeks to promote entrepreneurship. In order

to describe some main features of the new governmental regime, we will start with some examples of the way in which people are addressed today as learners. The Belgian/Flemish and European context will offer these examples.

13.3.1 The Strategic Importance of Learning Today: Examples

In the profiles for experienced and beginning teachers in Flanders, teaching is regarded as an activity based upon competencies (Ministry of Flemish Community 1999). However, it is stressed that in order to remain a professional, it is important for a teacher to take care of their ongoing professional development. So as to deal with professional development or lifelong learning, teachers should have “capacities for self-direction” (Ibid., p. 1). Teachers should regard their learning and the competencies generated during self-directed learning processes as a kind of capital for, or added value to their professional identities, the productivity of the school and the educational system in general.

Furthermore, companies and private and public organizations are seen as having a learning capacity that they should develop and manage. An organization is regarded as having a “collective brain function” and could and should develop this function in “mobilizing the mental and creative capacities” of the employees (Bomers, 1991, p. 4). Organizations are asked to focus not only on “survival learning” or “adaptive learning”, but foremost on “generative learning”. “Learning that enhances the capacity to create” (Senge, 1990, p. 14). Good managers should therefore understand that their role is to a large extent an educative role; i.e. to offer learning opportunities or a learning network that combines the empowerment of individuals and the company and allows for the employability of these individuals.

Another example is the way in which policy and policy makers view society itself. Politicians in Flanders and the Netherlands claim that stimulating lifelong learning and offering facilities for learning become governmental aims for “lifetime employability” (and a flexible labour market) as well as for individual self-realization – “to become what you want” (Vandenbroucke, 2004, p. 112). What is recommended is to stimulate an attitude where the meaning of learning is intrinsically mobilized at a fundamental level to contribute to the evolution of a learning society (European Commission, 1995). Furthermore, it is argued that we should be aware that this “will to learn” not only is a condition for our individual and collective well-being inside a state or inside the European Union, but is also required to remain competitive within an international environment. In this context competence-oriented education has become a central issue in actual policy making (Vandenbroucke, 2007).

For a final example that articulates the fundamental importance of learning in the way we come to think and speak about ourselves, we could look at how problems in society are now dealt with as learning problems. An unemployed person, for example, is not just someone who is in need of an income, but could be regarded as someone in need of additional learning. In this context Giddens claims, “The

guideline is that, when possible, investment in human capital should have priority over offering immediate economic support” (Giddens, 2000, p. 130). Poverty and many other forms of exclusion are now thought of in terms of lack as regards the acquisition of adequate human capital, irresponsibility towards one’s learning capacity or not being able to manage one’s learning. In all these cases it is assumed that investment in human capital is required.

What these examples clarify is interpellation at different places and levels in order to see ourselves as having a learning capacity and as being responsible to use and manage this capacity. What accompanies this interpellation is the idea that the “individual’s place in relation to fellow citizens will increasingly be determined by the capacity to learn” and that this “relative position, which could be called the ‘learning relationship’, will become an increasingly dominant feature in the structure of our societies” (European Commission, 1995, p. 2). These examples enable us to describe more generally the new governmental regime that we belong to.

13.3.2 From the Welfare State to Advanced Liberalism

In our opinion, *we*, addressed as learners, are no longer part of the social regime of government in the welfare state. While ‘the social’, ‘social norms’ and ‘socialization’ previously played a strategic role in governments’ social regimes, nowadays ‘inclusion’, ‘capital’ and ‘learning’ seem to be the main strategic components. Being part of society is no longer about being socialized and developing a social, normalized relation to the self. Instead it is an ongoing task of managing one’s learning process in order to produce human capital and to be able to use social capital (or relations of trust) in order to be included (Edwards, 2002, pp. 353–365).

While the ‘social citizen’ refers to the form of self-government in the social regime, the figure of the ‘entrepreneurial citizen’ or ‘entrepreneur of the self’ refers to the form of self-government promoted and stimulated today.² Entrepreneurship here is about using resources to produce a commodity that meets needs and offers an income. But entrepreneurship, as economists have pointed out, is not just a mechanical process of allocation and production. It also involves an ‘element of alertness’; i.e. a speculative, creative or innovative attitude to see opportunities in a competitive environment (Kirzner, 1973, p. 33). Entrepreneurship is a risky business. However, risk is not, as it is in the social regime, to be prevented, but instead is the condition for profit – a kind of “stimulating principle” (Giddens, 2000, pp. 73, 129). Identifying actual self-government as entrepreneurship means that people are required to look at themselves both as operating within an environment and as having certain needs that they can satisfy through creatively producing goods.

Entrepreneurship thus refers to the governable form of freedom in the present regime of government. Hence, government is not opposed to freedom, but operates through (a particular kind of) freedom. We will describe the kind of freedom at stake in more detail by focusing on both the ethics (of self-government) that is at stake and the central role of learning.

13.3.3 Learning and the Business Ethics of Self-Mobilization

Typical for the entrepreneurial self is the self-mobilization of knowledge and skills (Edwards, 2002, p. 359). Mobilization can be understood as bringing something (a potentiality) into a condition whereby it becomes employable (Sloterdijk, 1991, pp. 42–43). To live an entrepreneurial life is not about having a position in a normal, socialized structure but is about moving around in different environments and remaining employed in the “continuous business of living” (Gordon, 1991, p. 44). Thus self-mobilization refers not only to the responsibility of the entrepreneurial self to mobilize its human capital but also to the responsibility to capitalize one’s life in such a way that it has economic value (Rose, 1999, p. 162). For the entrepreneurial self, economic value is not only expressed in financial terms (and what is valued in the environment of the labour market) but applies to everything that enables the production of satisfaction of whatever needs in whatever environment.

Furthermore, self-mobilization and the ongoing capitalization of life require the fundamental disposition to renew one’s human capital; in other words, a *willingness and preparedness to learn*. For the entrepreneurial self, this decision to learn is similar to an act of investment – to be precise, an investment in human capital that is expected to offer an income or return. Learning as a well thought-out investment and as a responsible capitalization and mobilization of life is the main prerequisite for the ongoing business of life. In short, this business ethics is a kind of *adaptation* ethics based upon the following maxim: do what you want but take care that your human capital is adapted.

The adaptation ethics of entrepreneurial self-government can be described by identifying four components (cf. Foucault, 1984a, p. 33). The material or (moral) ‘substance’ of this form of self-government is human (and social) capital, and more particularly, knowledge or competencies. The ‘mode of subjection’ of the entrepreneurial practice of freedom is the permanent economic tribunal: people should develop a managerial attitude of calculation towards this material or substance and should, for example, find out which competencies are required or could be (come) functional, which competencies they want to/should invest in, etc. This substance and mode of subjection, thus, brings us to the ‘work upon the self’ that is needed: one is asked to *invest* in human capital, to *learn* or to *add* value to the self and to *find ways* of productive inclusion. Finally, this work upon the self has a particular teleology: the aim is the production of satisfaction of one’s own needs or the needs of others.

13.3.4 Governing Through Learning and the Learning Apparatus

It is important to stress at this point that this business ethic (the responsibility towards a capitalization of the self, towards self-mobilization and learning as investment) is actually being shaped in specific procedures and instruments. An illustration of this is the portfolio. A portfolio is a kind of ‘wallet’ including all knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be employed or mobilized (Birenbaum & Dochy, 1996). To use a portfolio implies that one is reflecting upon the self in terms of economic

value; i.e. identifying and classifying one's stock of human capital that could offer access to different environments. More generally speaking, this wallet with its stock of human capital descriptors can function as a kind of passport to obtain access to the business of life itself. Exemplary instances of this are the 'Europass-program' of the European Union and the proposal to develop a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competencies (Vandenbroucke, 2004, p. 11). This instrument (an electronic portfolio) requires that people engage in an ongoing documentation and marketization of the self and a formalization of its learning. At the same time, these kinds of instruments offer strategic data allowing (educational) policy to govern learning processes and to assess the learning force of the population.

These illustrations help to explain how the learning, entrepreneurial self (and its ethics of adaptation) is at the same time a governable subject of strategic importance for advanced liberal government. For this kind of government, citizens who experience learning as a fundamental force of adaptation have a strategic role because they guarantee that human capital will be adapted. Within this governmental rationality, the policy of change and adaptation is delegated to each entrepreneurial individual (or community, or organization) separately. In addition, the role of the state is to offer the infrastructure for self-mobilization and the opportunities for investment in human capital. Thus, it is the entrepreneurial self who should herself have a 'policy of change and adaptation' and who is able to do manage his or her learning capacity in a responsible, calculating, proactive way. Hence, within the advanced liberal regime of government, the strategic role of learning is to secure adaptation.

At this point, we can introduce the concept of the 'learning apparatus'.³ With this concept, we do not refer to an apparatus that is created, implemented or imposed by the state in order to organize learning. What we notice however is that these different and dispersed components become interconnected and are assembled in a kind of strategic complex. As a strategic complex, the learning apparatus embodies a kind of intention for it seeks to secure adaptation. The state has not invented this apparatus in order to secure adaptation. Instead, the 'power of the state' is an outcome of dispersed practices and discourses that seek to promote entrepreneurship and the capitalization of life through learning. What we see, therefore, is not the 'étatization' or domination of society and the learning potential of citizens by the state but a kind of 'governmentalization of the state' in the name of learning. Drawing upon a multitude of locales and practices that stimulate entrepreneurship, the state can 'translate' all types of policy challenges (e.g. unemployment, democratic participation, health care) into learning problems and seek to utilize components of the learning apparatus to offer solutions (e.g. training, citizenship education, programmes of risk prevention) (cf. Rose, 1996, p. 43).

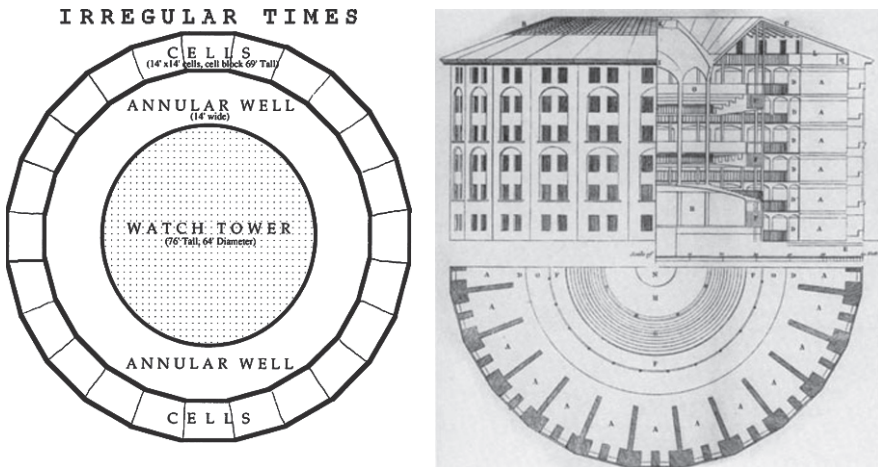
Similarly, this apparatus for securing adaptation through learning should not be regarded as the logical outcome of an original 'will to learn'. Instead, this 'will' is both part of this apparatus and its strategy. More precisely, this willingness to learn is both an effect and an instrument of the present governmental regime and its strategy to secure adaptation. It is an effect since the regime asks that entrepreneurial selves be prepared and able to learn, but at the same time an instrument because this 'will' is used to secure adaptation within society as a whole.

13.4 Conclusion

One aim of this chapter was to answer the question: for whom i.e. for which kind of subject does learning appear as a fundamental force to position and reposition oneself in society? What we have tried to show is that it is the entrepreneurial self (i.e. *we*, as entrepreneurial selves) who experiences learning as such and that the historical condition for this experience of learning (as capital, as what should be managed and as what is our responsibility) to emerge is a particular space of thought and a particular governmental configuration. In view of this analysis, we recommend reconsideration of the concepts ‘educationalization’ and ‘grammar of schooling’ so as to understand what is at stake today. We will clarify this by exploring what we regard as an important shift at the level of power elations: from *panoptical* power in modern society (and schools) to *synoptical* power in the current society (and learning environments) (cf. Simons, 2007).

Modern panoptical power seeks to discipline human beings through an internalized gaze of the other (i.e. the normalizing gaze of experts). Like inmates in a prison, pupils in a school, labourers in a factory and patients in a clinic come to understand themselves in terms of normality under the gaze of experts (teachers, managers, doctors). Our thesis is that the exercise of power today, which is related to the governmentalization of learning, cannot be explained with reference to the classic panopticon model. Instead, the exercise of power can be explained in terms of a self-imposed, reversed panopticon or *synopticon*. We will briefly elaborate on this thesis.

The panopticon refers to a form of power that works through the observation and surveillance of the many by the few, and where the few (those in power) are often not visible.



Source: <http://www.irregulartimes.com/panopt.html> (23-01-2008); http://www.deltaconsultants.com/images/leader_development.jpg (23-01-2008)

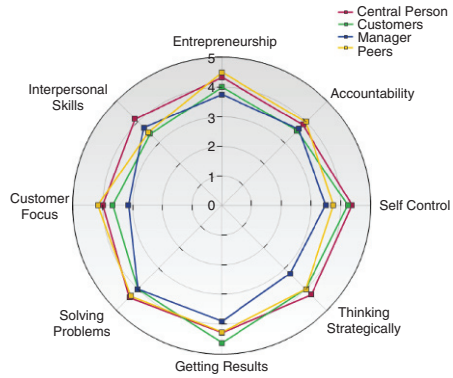
According to Foucault (1972/1989, p. 298) this modern form of power is quite different from the classic form of power embodied in the “spectacle”. In both the spectacle of public punishment and, indeed, the theatre, the many observe the few and this observation is meant to control the masses.



Source: <http://www.360-feedback.nl/> (23-01-2008)

Mathiessen (1997, p. 219) refers to this as the ‘synopticon’ and argues that our present ‘viewer society’ combines both ‘panoptical and synoptical’ mechanisms.⁴ Our thesis is that the ‘entrepreneurial self’ or ‘learner’ is indeed part of the ‘viewer society’ and that this self does indeed combine (in a subtle way) the elements of both individual surveillance and mass spectacle in a kind of synopticon.

For the entrepreneurial self, in view of her adaptation ethics, continuous assessment and feedback are indispensable. The learner is no longer in need of surveillance and normalizing instruction by experts (panopticism) but is in need of permanent monitoring, coaching and feedback in order to know oneself. Entrepreneurial self-knowledge is about the endless accumulation of learning outcomes in one’s personalized learning trajectory and about the in-between ‘trade balance’ of learning investments. Hence, what emerges is the permanent need for feedback: “How was my performance? Where am I standing? Please, evaluate me? (see also McKenzie, 2001) Feedback is the kind of information that is indispensable to orient one’s learning and therefore to ‘capitalize one’s life’. In other words, feedback functions as a kind of permanent ‘global positioning’ – permanent feedback information for permanent orientation. Hence, the panopticon or the evaluative gaze of others remains important for the entrepreneurial self, yet this gaze is the result of a deliberate choice. The entrepreneurial self wants to be observed and evaluated. What is at stake is a kind of voluntary submission to the self-chosen evaluative gaze of others, a voluntary form of social control or a self-created panoptical environment. The technique of ‘360-degree feedback’ can be regarded as paradigmatic for the new mode of power and control in today’s society.



Source: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AnS/Classics/roman_provinces/tunisia/image41.htm (23-01-2008); http://architectures.danlockton.co.uk/?page_id=4 (23-01-2008)

This short exploration is not only meant to indicate that concepts such as ‘disciplinary power’ and ‘panoptism’ (often related to the concept ‘educationalization’) are no longer adequate to describe power in today’s society, but also to reveal some dimensions of the current mode of power in the learning apparatus. We want to stress again that the present experience of learning cannot be disconnected from a governmentalization of learning and synoptical power; learning is both a force of adaptation for entrepreneurial self-government and an instrument to secure the adaptation or added value of capital within society. Therefore, looking at learning and the liberation of our learning (from the state, from institutions, from the dominance of the teacher, from the impact of the economy, etc.) as a condition for our freedom and autonomy implies that we forget that this learning and the way in which we conceive it are from the very beginning both effect and instrument of the current governmental regime.

In conclusion, therefore, we find it necessary to point out the irony that accompanies the learning apparatus within this governmental regime: this regime makes us believe that learning is about our freedom (cf. Foucault, 1976). Accordingly, we do not think that what is needed today is a liberation of learning (from the state, from the economy, from ideology, etc.), nor yet another distinction between learning with an emancipatory potential and learning with a disciplinary potential (cf. Delanty, 2003, see also Biesta, 2006). What we find necessary is that we free ourselves from learning, that is, from the experience of learning as a fundamental force that is necessary for our freedom and collective well-being.

In line with this, we hope our critical re-reading of ‘what is being said and written’ (about learning) today brings about a kind of de-familiarization that is at the same time a kind of de-subjectification: pulling oneself free of oneself. Perhaps this act of ‘liberation’, that is, a transformation of the relation of the self to the self, points at another idea and practice of education (beyond learning or learning to learn).

Notes

1. The first and second sections of this paper are partly based on Simons & Masschelein, 2008.
2. Foucault focused on this figure of ‘entrepreneurship’ and the ‘entrepreneurial self’ in his analysis of neo-liberalism at the level of governmentality (Foucault 2004a, cf. Gordon, 1991, p. 44).
3. For the notion of apparatus or ‘dispositif’ cf. Foucault, 1979, p. 125. For the idea of assemblage or putting components together ‘fabricated’ in different (temporal, spatial) contexts: Rose, 1999, p. 53, Dean 1999: 29, Burchell 1996, p. 26.
4. Mathiessen (1997, p. 219) clarifies his use of the term ‘synopticon’ as follows: ‘The concept is composed of the Greek word *syn* which stands for ‘together’ or ‘at the same time’, and *opticon*, which, again, has to do with the visual. It may be used to represent the situation where large number focuses on something in common which is condensed’.

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