

¹An horizon of freedom: using Foucault to think differently about education and learning

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Abstract

Building on the work of others this paper sketches out what a Foucauldian 'education' might look like in practice, considers some of the challenges, paradoxes and impossibilities with which such an 'education' would face us, and indicates some of the cherished conceits and reiterated necessities that we must give up if we take seriously the need for an education that fosters an orientation to critique and curiosity. Three elements of Foucault's 'philosophical ethos' that might be translated into educational practices are addressed. First, fostering a learning environment that encourages experimentation. Second, enabling the development of an awareness of one's current condition as defined and constructed by the given culture and historical moment. Third, encouraging an attitude or disposition to critique; a focus on the production of particular sorts of dispositions that would be valued and fostered. All of this raises issue about 'the teacher'.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is modest. It is an attempt to explore some possibilities for what might be called a Foucauldian education. It draws from and builds upon a number of existing forays into the use of Foucault's later work to think differently (*penser autrement*) about teaching and learning: (Chokr, 2009); (Infinito, 2003a); (Leask, 2011); (Allan, 1999); (Pignatelli, 1993); (Butin, 2001) among others. Nonetheless, the task is made particularly challenging in as much that the space in which to think differently, that Foucault's critique intends to produce, is a space of transgression and experiment, not a space of prescription. Thus, what is offered here can only be some possibilities and starting points, provocations rather than firm proposals. The paper adds to an existing string of dots and temporary abutments. There is also a problem regarding terminology – I use the terms pedagogy, curriculum and assessment and teacher, at points in the paper when there is no alternative to refer to aspects of educational experience while at the same time starting from a position of critique that seeks to displace these concepts and practices and all their connotations.

The paper begins by outlining Foucault's use of critique as 'a means of maintaining mobility of mind and spirit; of avoiding a fixed, stabilized view of the ever-changing present; of maintaining a critical awareness of oneself and the place and time in which one resides' (Batters, 2011: 1). Critique is a technology for clearing away things we take as natural and necessary, in order to begin elsewhere. Critique is also a tactic for establishing the contingency of truth, power and subjectivity. From that starting point the paper outlines the possibilities of refusal and self-formation as the basis

of a pedagogy as ethico-politics - that is as self-formation - and curriculum as genealogy, and teaching as the fostering of the disposition of curiosity, before addressing the problem of the teacher and the teacher learner relation as form of a 'parrhesiatic contract'. The sections intertwine and overlap in various ways.

Overall in educational studies there is a tendency to interpret and use Foucault as a philosopher of oppressions, drawing primarily on the work of his *middle period* and its focus on the problem of power, and in particular on *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979). From this, the means of correct training, the panopticon, normalisation etc. are deployed to explore, or more often re-describe, the processes of schooling, or the experience of teaching and learning, in terms of surveillance, classification and exclusion². In this vein, some refer to Foucault's 'bleak' and one-sided vision of modernity (e.g. (McNay, 2013) (Scheurich & Bell McKenzie, 2005) or his analysis as revealing 'the grim truth of the education process – namely, that it is a core element in the mechanics of modern disciplinarity' (Leask, 2011: 59). Those are right and proper readings of and uses of Foucault, and ones that he acknowledged, but they are also partial. What is missing from such renditions is a proper sense of the purpose and thrust of Foucault's analytical endeavours. That is, his intention to destabilise, to make things 'not as necessary as all that'. Foucault, as a philosopher of contestation and difference, seeks to undermine self-evidences and open up spaces for acting and thinking differently about our relation to ourselves and to others and identify and refuse and transgress the horizon of silent objectification within which we are articulated. Such critique enables us to recognise that the things,

values, and events that make up our present experience 'have been constituted historically, discursively, practically' (Mahon, 1992: 14), and indeed that the self, our subjectivity, is historically produced in and through technologies and relations of power - see below. The point here for Foucault is not simply to record mundane processes of *ways in which we are made subject to* rather it is a means of opening up possibilities of self formation. Foucault does not intend that his analyses produce an horizon of absolute subjection and domination but rather the opposite, an horizon of freedom, that is, as he put it:

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. (Foucault in Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988: 9)

Critique and freedom

The essence of Foucault's critique is a curiosity towards the arts of being governed and 'all of those practices and discourses that seek to homogenise subjectivity, to make it uniform, and narrow the spoke of freedom' (Milchman & Rosenberg, 2011: 12) – of which schooling would be a case in point. This is a permanent orientation of skepticism; 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality' (Foucault in Rabinow (1987: 39). This requires not just a 'gesture of rejection' rather 'we have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers' (ibid 45). These possibilities of freedom are more directly and clearly explored in

the later Foucault, more precisely around 1980 he began to articulate a *politics of the care of the self* (Foucault, 2016). What I want to explore here is some ways this later work enables us to think education differently, in particular in relation to the concept of *self formation*. That is, education as the production of a subject 'capable of turning back upon itself: of critically studying the processes of its own constitution, but also subverting them and effecting changes in them' (Oksala, 2005: 165). *Self formation* in this sense is a starting point for experiments with an education or educations that do not simply reconstitute what has failed in the past. Starting with *self formation* enables and requires us to dismantle the tired and constraining imaginary architecture of schooling - curriculum, pedagogy and assessment - and their very particular grammar or meanings and concomitant social arrangements of space and time – that we call an education.

Here, drawing on and using ideas and propositions adumbrated by a small group of Foucauldian constructivists (noted above), I will sketch out what a Foucauldian education might look like in practice, and consider some of the challenges, paradoxes and impossibilities with which it would face us, and indicate some of the cherished conceits and reiterated necessities that we must give up if we take seriously the possibility an education that fosters a permanent orientation to curiosity. However, to reiterate, if we wish to take up the *later* Foucault as a starting point for thinking education differently there is no template to follow, no guidelines for an educational programme, rather some poorly marked tracks and vague signposts that are starting points. Following Foucault's

style and 'method' what is offered is not a programmatic account of some alternative to what *is*. As he suggests we cannot conceive of alternatives within the discursive possibilities we current inhabit. We are bound by epistemic rules and closures that enable and constrain us to think within certain versions of what is and might be true – the conditions of possibility of modern thought, established practices of remembering and forgetting, an exteriority that is prior to any conscious activity of a meaningful subjectivity. As he explained: 'I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system' (Foucault, 1997 p. 230). Furthermore, in seeking to think differently we must leave behind any desire to find a foundational metaphysics for critical action and strive to escape 'the over-used, colonised lexicon of critical education' (Zalloua, 2004: 239). Rather we must embrace 'the power of strangeness' and the inevitability of failure, and 'resist the obscuring clarity of rational philosophical discourse' (Carroll, 1982: 181) and thus make both our present and our past alien to us. We must struggle with the idea of ourselves, as 'both a discursively produced effect and a viable site of resistance' (Zalloua, 2004: 234). This is ethics as a practice rather than a plan, as 'the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself...' (Foucault, 1983: 263), a question of how we govern our own conduct, both our behaviour and our purposes, and the possibility of unending change both to ourselves and to the 'arrangements' in which we contingently find ourselves.

Authoring one's ethical self

Foucault was adamant that there is no simple relationship between critique and action. The main task is as much or perhaps even more one of refusal as it is resistance. 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are' (Foucault, 2000a: 336). This is a *negative ethics*, not a matter of asserting ideals, but rather an aestheticism – an imaginative creativity. This is a form of ethico-politics that is visceral rather than abstract, rooted as much in the physical and emotional as it is in logic. It rests on a refusal to accept the grounds on which subjectivity is proposed within dominant discourses and a willingness to subvert them – a subversion that is transformative rather than just disruptive. This creativity focuses on the care of the self and of others, and involves both the *techne* of the self and the *techne* of life. It is the cultivation of a self that is on the one hand a product of and a disruption of various discourses and on the other the practice of the art of living well, living differently, relating to others in different ways. This is the construction of a *heterotopia* (Tamboukou, 2006) both intellectual and practical, in which space and time are somehow 'other': disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming, and within which it is possible to make oneself thinkable in a different way – to become other than how you find yourself – that is, a search for 'other' experiences³. In these respects self-formation is an active and engaged process, based on questioning and learning from the immediate and quotidian, on forming and testing at the same time; an 'exercise of oneself in the activity of thought' (Foucault, 1992: 9).

All of this would involve a plurality of refusals, resistances and struggles against local fixations of power in specific sites, in part through 'counter-conducts' (Davidson, 2001) (Meade, 2014) and creative strategies of non-compliance that then open up possibilities of 'autonomous and independent subjectivation, that is, possibilities for the constitution of oneself' (Lazzarato, 2009: 114). Counter conducts are active interventions in the ethical domain, refusals to be governed this way, the cultivation of the arts of 'voluntary insubordination, and a practice of reflective intractability' (Foucault, 1997: 32). Such practices of refusal show us that 'the production of something new in the world might be possible' (Deleuze, 1991:163). They are vehicles or opportunities for exploring new forms of existence, of being 'otherwise'.

Refusal offers the potential for a re-politicisation of everyday life by re-opening to question the taken for granted and naturalised concepts, practices, relations and social arrangements through which we relate to ourselves and to others. However, by denaturalising the categories that organise and define our experience, and make us what we are, we enter into a worrying, indeed frightening space in which we must 'un-think' our common sense and recognise as fragile and contingent many of our modernist certainties. In this way we might begin to recognise that all knowledge is uncertain; that truth is unstably linked to power, and that our intelligibility is constantly in question. The task is to eschew certainty in order to become an ironic hero of our own life by 'tak(ing) oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration' (Foucault in Rabinow 1987: 166). We engage in unmaking our selves and what we have become and thus at the same time make

intolerable the institutions and experiences within which our intelligibility is constructed. In other words, our subjectivity becomes a site of political struggle (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

To sum up: what is involved here is a creative and aesthetic politics that is not reliant on the pre-given, tainted, moral principles that we take to define humanity, or which require us to search for and link our essential qualities to inherent abstract principles. Instead one is set the challenge 'of creatively and courageously authoring one's ethical self' (Foucault, 1977: 154).

... it is a question of searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, transforming ourselves. (Foucault 1997: 179)

What is at stake here is the 'arrangements' that have created the modern subject. The point is to make these arrangements untenable and unacceptable and to begin to establish the conditions for the creation of new modes of subjectivity. 'And in this case, one of the main political problems nowadays would be, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves' (Ibid 213). The question is then how might this translate into something we might conceive of as an education?

Education as Self-formation

Leask (2011: 57) argues that if we take seriously the focus on the practices of education in the later Foucault then:

... instead of being rendered into factories of obedient behaviour, schools or colleges can be the locus for a critically informed, oppositional micro-politics. In other words: the power-relations that (quite literally) constitute education can now be regarded, on Foucault's own terms, as being creative, "enabling" and positive.

That is, we can re-think education in ways that respond to Foucault's question 'how could it be possible to elaborate new kinds of relationships to ourselves' (Berkeley Lecture 1). (U-Tube)? Indeed, Butin (2006: 371) suggests that there is 'a seemingly natural affinity between Foucault's insights – into, for example, power, knowledge, resistance, subjectification – and educational research and practice' and Leask (2011: 67) argues that in Foucault's later work there are possibilities which indicate that pedagogy can be reconsidered not simply as a technique for the manufacture of imposition but as 'the theatre of subject creation, of new "practices of the self", new kinds of relations – especially via continued resistance to domination'. Leask also suggests that 'teachers and students alike can now be regarded as creative agents, capable of voluntary and intentional counter-practices....' (67). This is what Infinito (2003a) calls 'a political pedagogy'. She identifies from Foucault's essay *What is Enlightenment?* (Foucault, 2000b) three elements of the 'philosophical ethos' - a type of philosophical interrogation - that is, three different aspects involved in working on oneself, that might

be translated into educational practices, although she goes on to say: 'How these technologies are applied and what they might look like specifically in daily life or in the classroom are important questions that call for further theoretical analysis and practical application ...' (2003: 165)⁴.

First, fostering a learning environment that encourages experimentation. Here the classroom is an ethical space, a political space, and a concrete space of freedom. Second, as outlined above, enabling the development of an awareness of one's current condition as defined and constructed by the given culture and historical moment. Third, again as outlined above, encouraging an attitude of critique with a focus on the production of particular sorts of dispositions that would be valued and fostered, made explicit (questions of subjectivity) – like skepticism, detachment, outrage, intolerance and tolerance. This would involve the valuing and facilitating both what Olssen (2009) calls 'difference', as the basis of 'thin' community, and audacity and fearlessness.

Spaces of education

As a framework for educational practice the first precept suggests the need to attend to the form and nature of the spaces of education - the setting, its frames and practices, and its architecture. Self-formation here, in the very immediate sense, requires spaces where our actions as learners are attended to, carefully considered and taken seriously enough to merit a response. This would be a space in which agonism would be valued and failure would be a constructive opportunity to learn and to change – both of which take time - the pace of education would

need to slow down. In such a space it would always be possible to 'start again' and who one is and what one thinks and to what one is committed to would remain tentative, open to revision⁵. Youdell (2011: 115) suggests that this means 'intervening in the intolerable present to make "*that-which-is*", "*no longer that-which-is*" inviting us to imagine becomings that disrupt the intolerable ... offering instead moments of the haecceity⁶ of "this thing' or "here is"". The aim would be to make

the past come undone at the seams, so that it loses its unity, continuity, and naturalness, so that it does not appear any more as a single past that has already been made, but rather, as a heterogeneous array of converging and diverging struggles that are still on going and only have the appearance of having been settled. (Infinito, 2003a: 27).

In this heterotopic space (and time) we must attend to frameworks of knowability and unknowability, at the same time, always bearing in mind that ignorance is formed by knowledge and vice versa.

Genealogy as Curriculum/ curriculum as curiosity

Infinito's second condition for a political pedagogy suggests genealogy as curriculum and the centrality of the question of truth. In stark contrast to the modernist classroom the concern is not with what is true but with the how of truth. Knowledge becomes a problem rather than a question. As Infinito (2003a: 168) suggests: 'Here, we might imagine a curriculum designed to enable multiple genealogical investigations into many other human constructs and

disciplines'. This is what Chokr (2009) calls an *unlearning* which rests on the question of 'how should we govern ourselves'. Unlearning 'should encourage students to think deeply and critically about the illusory world of all the ideas, notions, and beliefs that hem, jostle, whirl, confuse and oppress them' and 'requires of them a reversal of standpoint' (61). This would involve a view of knowledge as games of truth, and in relation to this 'the collapse of objective meaning leaving us free to create our own lives and ourselves' (Wain 2007: 173). This is a form of 'combative' or guerrilla pluralism' in which there is no *epistemic innocence* (Medina, 2011: 30).

What the *guerrilla* pluralism of the Foucaultian genealogical method can help produce is *epistemic insurrections* that have to be constantly renewed and remain always ongoing in order to keep producing epistemic friction. (Medina 2011: 33).

'Dislocation' and 'decoding', as Chokr (2009: 62) puts it, are necessary to place 'in abeyance the propositions and assumptions underlying and governing understanding and behaviour'. To reiterate, this is not an abdication of truth but rather a self-conscious engagement in the games of truth, destabilising truth rather than learning it, historicising excellence and beauty rather than appreciating it - 'a commitment to uncertainty' (Youdell, 2011). This might also involve the recovery of subjugated knowledges and thinking 'tactically about the multiple effects of texts and classroom engagements' (Code, 2007: 69) and drawing out and making 'visible subjugated meanings and unsettle and

open up to troubling those meanings that inscribe the normative' (69). At the same time we must come to see and understand past subjects differently, by activating counter-memories. That is, a struggle against collective forgetting particularly in relation to social injustices. This might also involve a focus on the *writerliness* of texts and 'de-naturalizing our habitual economy of reading' and 'the consumerist model of reading' (Zalloua 2004: 239). Rather, this is writing and 'reading as a practical strategy in the constitution of the self' (Ibid 234), two key technologies for the care of the self.

Above all, this is a classroom in which the aim is to cultivate an orientation of curiosity – 'a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way ... a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental' (Foucault, 1980: 328)⁷. However, this is 'not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that enables one to get free of oneself' (Foucault, 1988b: 8). It relies on: 'the knower's straying afield of himself'. Curiosity is one means of loosening our relation to a fixed identity, creating the possibility of erring, of 'no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do, or think' (Foucault: 47 in Rabinow 1987). 'Curiosity is indeed what enables the student (the curious subject par excellence) to resist the powerful lure of ideological complacency' (Zalloua 2004: 239) and to challenge and disrupt 'the economy of the Same' (ibid 242).

A disposition of critique

The third task and dimension of a political pedagogy is the cultivation of an attitude or disposition to critique and in relation to this there are certain qualities of character, like courage (Foucault, 2011), which might be formed and might be needed here, not as abstract or self-managing dispositions, as currently intended by so-called 'character education' (Dishon & Goodman, 2017) but as the basis for action and interaction in the spaces of learning. However, Infinito (2003a: 170) warns:

Lest we think this a radical notion, we must remember that education is practiced at producing desirable dispositions. A history of the hidden curriculum reveals specific attitudes infusing education at various times, deemed part of its responsibility.

The point here would be to encourage ethical teacher/learners who have a healthy suspicion of the present but who are also able to acknowledge their own fallibility. That is, 'teachers' and learners who are open to infinite possibilities for change and are willing to critique their own commitments. This would mean adopting a critical stance that oscillates between attempts to re-create ourselves and the world and in doing so 'make ourselves vulnerable to the past' (Medina 2011: 28) and 'open ourselves up to interrogation' (29).

The 'learning' processes involved here may be part of what Zembylas (2015: 315-16) and others call a *pedagogy of discomfort*; drawing on what Foucault termed 'the ethic of discomfort' (Foucault, 2000a). That is, students and teachers are

challenged to embrace their vulnerability and accept the ambiguity of self and their dependence on others (Zembylas, 2015: 170) and are constantly “jarred” from their habitual everydayness’ (Chokra 2009: 63). Teaching/learning thus becomes a series of crises, disruptions and impasses. Part of the pedagogical challenge for the ‘teacher’ is to create a social and ethical environment within which discomfort is productive. As Felman (1992: 53) argues:

If teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerable unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught . . . I therefore think that my job as a teacher, paradoxical as it may sound, was that of creating in the class the highest state of crisis that it could withstand...

Infinito (2003b: 75) discusses this in an explanation of the use of the ‘Blue-eyed-brown-eyed’ classroom event and writes of a ‘struggle with the propriety of subjecting students unknowingly to ridicule and discomfort. At the same time, perhaps the most profound education is always discomforting’. The goal is to create a space within which it is possible to begin to confront and re-imagine the historically sedimented questions and problem(atizations) through which we address the world. That is, a curriculum within which we can re-constitute our present – opening up ‘a room, understood as a room of concrete freedom, that is possible transformation’ (Foucault 1972: 5). Conceived and practiced in this way education becomes an exploration and mapping of limits, and testing and crossing them when possible – a set of multiple transgressions that allow ‘individuals to peer over

the edge of their limits, but also confirms the impossibility of removing them' (Allan, 1999: 48). Such experiences have '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' (Foucault 2000b p. 241). This is a sequence of moments, openings, spaces in which *unlearning* is possible – an exploration of ethical heterotopias, real and unreal, where difference is affirmed, 'a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live' ⁸. In relation to this first and foremost, students must be recognized as ethical beings capable of reflection, decision-making and responsibility for their identity and their social relations. That is to say, 'ethical self formation as moral pedagogy allows for the maintenance and production of the learners' freedom' (Infinito 2003b: 68). In a similar way, Sicilia-Camacho & Fernández-Balboa (2009: 458) recast critical pedagogy in Foucauldian terms and assert that: 'Our version of CP (critical pedagogy) seeks the construction of personal-pedagogical-political ethics while acknowledging the legitimacy of different 'pedagogical games' and "regimes of truth"⁹. In these ways, education and pedagogy are articulated not as bundles of skills and knowledges but as the formation of moral subjectivity, a form of practical politics, a struggle to become self-governing. This is not liberation but activation, an enduring engagement in the travails and failures of self-fashioning, experimenting with and choosing what we might be and how we might relate to others. It is ethics as a 'social praxis', experiments with 'forms, modes and styles of life' (Infinito, 2003b) and new social and political forms. It is driven by failure and the need to 'fail again' but better, rather than the expectation

of success or closure. It values the pluralisation and agonism of voices and contestation over consensus and resolution. It recognises that solutions give rise to new problems and rests of what Wenham (2013) calls 'the tragic view of the world', according to which conflict, suffering and strife are inevitable phenomena of social and political life and may never be ultimately overcome.

Teaching here becomes a process of asking questions without providing answers, the goal is to explore 'to what extent it might be possible to think differently (*penser autrement*)' (Foucault, 1992: 9). It is education as epistemological suspicion.

Education and unlearning become both enabling and destructive and 'what is at stake is the production of a certain kind of experience, a reconfiguring of experience itself' (Geuss, 2008: 9). This is different from CP, this is 'a morality as *action*, recognizing individual's capacity to develop alternative "subjectivities" and make appropriate decisions' as distinct from CP as a 'moral process whose goal is the emancipation of others' (Sicilia-Camacho & Fernández-Balboa 2009: 458).

The problem of the teacher; 'One always needs the help of others in the soul's labour upon itself' (Foucault, 1994).

All of this, as Youdell (2011: 11) aptly puts it, is 'fraught' and begs difficult questions about what a learner and a teacher (or guide, mentor) are. Foucault sees no objection to 'those who know more in a given game of truth' telling another 'what he must do, teach him', the problem in this relationship and interaction is 'to avoid the

effects of dominance' (Foucault, 1988a). In relation to which Biesta (2013) usefully distinguishes between 'learning from' and 'being taught by'. There is a mutuality to the relations of power here, and in *Self Writing*¹⁰, Foucault quotes Seneca, saying 'The process is mutual; for men learn while they teach'. The bond between master and disciple, as Foucault puts it, is always provisional and circumstantial, a dialogue based on respect and mutual care, and mutual development, a relationship open to constant scrutiny and revision. The teacher here is a 'genuine interlocutor', some one who takes risks and relishes challenges, in order to create a public space where fearless speech is encouraged. All of this must rest on the relationship, for the teacher as much as the student, between care of the self and the care of others. And as Foucault points out in his survey of Greek political thought there is a fundamental relation between governing others and governing the self: 'One will not be able to rule if one is not oneself ruled' (Foucault, 1990: 89). The exercise of political power demands the practice and cultivation of personal virtues. 'It is the power over self which will regulate the power over others ... if you care for yourself correctly i.e., if you know ontologically what you are ... then you cannot abuse your power over others' (Foucault, 1988a: 8). This can be transposed into the problem of pedagogical power and would re-envisage teaching as an ethical practice, and would mean constructing one's relation to the learner differently, with a primary focus on attending to and facilitating their impulse of curiosity and making the classroom as site of 'ethico-aesthetic self-fashioning' (Zalloua 2004: 244) – organised and re-organised in relation to the problem of what kind of self am I going to be? As Foucault (1997: 300) remarks in order to care for the self, one

needs a 'master of care', a guide, a counsellor, a friend and he counsels the need to offset 'the dangers of solitude' and as Olssen (2007: 207) makes clear: 'Ethical action is not, for Foucault, an individual affair but presupposes a certain political and social structure with respect to liberty'. Self formation is not a lonely narcissism but is only possible within what Falzon calls 'the fundamental encounter with the other' (1998: 36), within which 'our narcissistic reveries are shattered, the circle of our solipsism is burst' (34). Here, the life we live among other subjects, as Infinito puts it, is 'the stuff of ethics', it is the fashioning of 'a mode of being which emerges from our own history and thinking' (2003a: 73). Clearly, refusing to be a 'proper' teacher means that the teacher is also vulnerable in the 'classroom', putting their subjectivity at risk. As Deacon (2006: 184) points out practices of liberty in the classroom 'are inextricably intertwined with pedagogical effects of guilt, obligation and verification, and assumptions about degrees of ignorance, dependence on others, legitimate compulsion and achievement'. Here teaching and learning are a set of experiments that are both exciting and frightening, based on the 'parrhesiatic contract' – in which both parties speak frankly (Peters, 2003). The teacher has 'the task of establishing a vital, vibrant public space for truth-telling to occur' (Pignatelli 2002 p. 174). This is necessarily a very 'concrete, palpable experience' (Falzon 1998 p. 33), it is 'the art of living dangerously' (Allan 1999 p. 58). Emotions, intellectual risks and trust become intermingled in complex and difficult ways. Nonetheless, in these ways, teaching might become a site of 'delight in oneself' (Foucault 1990: 65).

In Greek politics the ability to govern was not defined ‘as if it were a question of a “profession” with its particular skills and techniques’ (Foucault, 1990: 91) – which is how we have come to conceive of the work of the teacher – but rather depended on ethical work of the self on the self – that is the work of self formation. The point is not to ‘accept’, but to experiment to create, to think critically, to imagine, to make judgments about what it is we do not want to be and what it is we might want to be. This is both negative, a disavowal of the contingently normal, and positive, thinking differently about ourselves, a transgression, an agonism, a struggle that produces us as ethical beings, a disposition toward and constant activity of changing and an unending search for autonomy. The self becomes ‘autonomous’ only through ‘concrete possibilities which present themselves as invitations for the practice of liberty’ (Bemauer & Rasmussen, 1994: 71).

From here to there?

All of this begs many questions about how we get from where we are now – wedded to an education system that is absurd (Ball, 2018) and oppressive and that conflates education with schooling – to the possibility of education as something different. How do we move from a system of education that rests on an assumption of ignorance and a reverence to the past, and that can only function through practices of exclusion and humiliation, to a form of education that eschews system altogether and offers no privilege to the past and rather consists of a process of creative self fashioning, the opening up of vulnerability, unruly curiosity, and frank speaking. A space of education that is not define defined and

limited by an institutional rationale but part of and related to forms of self-fashioning carried out elsewhere and to the broader life of the citizen, in a 'constant effort to expand the scope of new modes of subjectivity, by creating the space for the flourishing of a multiplicity of arts of living' (Milchman & Rosenberg, 2011: 12)? The answer is, I do not know. What I can offer is some incitements towards 'the critique of what we are and experiments with the possibility of going beyond' (Foucault in Rabinow 1987 p. 108) that combines outrage with limit-testing and careful scholarship, and which cultivates 'the art of voluntary insubordination, and a practice of reflective intractability' (ibid 32).

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Notes

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² Foucault himself (2010: 3) refers to this early, middle, late periodization or rather signals the changing emphases in his analyses, from knowledge, to power, to subjectivity, that is 'studying each of these three areas in turn' (4), as moving from a focus on *forms of knowledge*, to *the matrix of forms of behavior*, to *the constitution of the subject's modes of being*.

³ As Tavani (2013) argues this involves a reading of the myriads of intermediate spaces hosted between the two poles of confirmation or subversion (see also (Foucault, 2006)

⁴ One of many such developments would be to consider how self-formation might relate to primary and secondary schooling, unless of course such a division is rendered redundant by the work of critique, as I think it might. More challenging might be whether self-formation should be thought about in relation to developmental stages and for example Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981). But again we might want to take such a conception of the child subject as needing to be dispensed with entirely.

⁵ And thus perhaps we have also to give up on linearity, the developmentalist conception of education.

⁶ Which denotes the discrete qualities, properties or characteristics of a thing that make it a *particular* thing.

⁷ Mahmood (2011) extolls the virtues of curiosity in a recent paper on the role of SATs in English education.

⁸ "Des Espace Autres," published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October, 1984: <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.

⁹ There is further work to be done here in teasing out the important differences between Foucault's self-formation and more familiar versions of critical pedagogy which draw on Friere, Illich and others. (Biesta, 2017) is a helpful resource in this task.

¹⁰ (Foucault, nd.)