

SUSEES 2017

Lecture 6

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Evaluating Education in Europe

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Introduction

The lecture addresses the topic of educational evaluation in the European Education Area, starting from the acknowledgement of the widespread of policies, measures, procedures and tools for school evaluation that has interested compulsory schooling in almost all the countries that belong to the European Area (Eurydice, 2015). What I argue for is the existence of a discourse on school evaluation which is global and particularly effective in the European Area. Such a discourse finds its distinctive traits in the recurrence of a set of discursive regularities. The analysis of these **discursive regularities** represents the specific object of this lecture.

The lecture presents a novel account of this discourse of school evaluation, with its related imperatives of measurement, commensurability, comparison and continuous improvement. In doing so, it employs Michel Foucault's archaeological method (Foucault, 2002a; 2002b; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Gutting, 1989) and adopts as a privileged space of observation the European field of education.

The aim is to show how such a discourse finds its conditions of existence in an episteme where: a) the epistemological space is structured along a trihedron whose vertices are represented by the mathematical and physical sciences, the sciences of life and the philosophical reflection; b) the discourse of school evaluation develops through a set of specific conceptual transferences from economy and biology; c) modern man, intended here as an empirical-transcendental allotrope, is the central figure; d) a modern ethic of action and intervention plays a crucial role in the fabric of morality.

Drawing on Foucault (2002a; 2002b; Dean, 2010), the main idea underlying this lecture is that, if one wants to understand the emergence of school evaluation (and its technologies such as international testing and league tables or the diverse neo-managerialist models to evaluate organizational and individual performance, to make just few examples) on the surface of our educational present, it is indispensable to locate the raising of evaluation as a discourse within the modern episteme (Foucault, 2002a) and its space of knowledge, disclosing in particular the rules of formation of evaluative knowledge.

The lecture has the overall aim to highlight how in the European Education Area it is possible to recognize the effectiveness of a discourse of school evaluation that:

- has the project to establish itself, at different levels, a mathematical formalization;
- proceeds through models and/or concepts translated from economy and biology;
- explores some distinctive empirical manifestations of ‘that mode of being of man which philosophy is attempting to conceive at the level of radical finitude’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 379).

It is exactly the continuous reference to these three dimensions that constitutes the conditions of existence of the discourse of school evaluation.

In developing this argument, the lecture will focus especially on the relevance of the conceptual transferences from economy in the constitution of the discourse of school evaluation. I will attempt to show how educational words, beings and objects of need take their places and arrange themselves in relation to one another in a space of knowledge and in forms which are heavily informed by the rise of production as a fundamental figure (ivi, p. 275), which in turn makes visible new objects and subjects that become knowable employing the concepts and methods of economy. Referring to this epistemic conditions, the lecture ends with some exploratory and perspectival reflections, highlighting the epistemological challenges that I suggest one should engage with in the attempt to imagine alternative evaluative theories, models and approaches or, more fundamentally, in outlining a different evaluative aesthetics.

The value of the analysis that I will present throughout the lecture lies, in my view, in two distinct traits. First, it goes beyond a mere critique of the contemporary obsession for evaluation in the field of European education, showing how and to what extent it is rooted in the deeper categories of Western thought and the processes of rationalization that are a key driver of modernity. What it allows to focus on are the wider domains of validity, normativity and actuality (Foucault, 2002b, p. 68) within which truth and falsehood of any evaluative statement about education and its qualities is discussed, certain educational statements are excluded or marginalised as well as educational problems and their solutions are thought (and hierarchized) and enacted by policy-makers, professionals and technicians.

Second, it represent a crucial step, although an initial and non sufficient one, to grasp: a) the processes through which the objects, the subjects and the concepts of the education space are shaped; b) the social construction of actors’ answers to evaluation policies themselves (i.e. the forms of enactment of the educational practice).

Given this general framework, the lecture is structured in 5 sections. I will briefly summarize the main points that will be made in each section.

Section 1 – Defining the archive. The discourse of school evaluation

In the first section of the lecture I will try to present, briefly and descriptively, how and to what extent school evaluation has become a widespread approach used in quality assurance across Europe. Drawing on policy and official document (Eurydice, 2015; European Council, 2009; European Commission, 2012; OECD, 2013) I will show how the widespread of school evaluation is related to distinctive bodies of knowledge, forms of expertise and authority and a related ethico-political frame. Moreover, the lecture will illustrate how such a grid of discursive regularities emerges within (and contributes to the constitution of) a multi-scalar transnational policyscape where a distinctive set of powerful and heterogeneous assemblages of agencies, bodies of

knowledge and technologies perform the power to shape educational change in Europe. The bodies of knowledge constituting this space are the field of investigation of this lecture, whereas the conditions of existence of these bodies of knowledge are the specific object of analysis. During the lecture, however, I will provide a clarification on a key point. What we face is a field of knowledge production shaped by a plurality of statements that are very different in their nature, and which co-opt, enrol and engage each others: policy statements, scientific statements, advisory statements, and so on. If we look at the political and public space, on the one hand, we can observe the progressive affirmation of a specific and yet heterogeneous set of evaluation theories, techniques, tools and procedures as the *doxa*, the one best way to make and think about evaluation as a key mode of governing of an effective education system. This stands out against, on the other hand, the background of intense debates in the academic/intellectual space on the adequacy of these theories/models/methods in respect to the evaluandum/object, their robustness, their limits and possibilities and the formulation of different theories and models and methods. Such a knowledge space offers an image of itself as a field of struggle between different theories, opinions, methods and techniques, and epistemic communities. So what?

What I will try to show is how and to what extent the approach proposed here has the potential to offer a contribution both to the debate on evaluation and its possible theoretical and practical development and to the critical (but constructive) engagement of educational scholars with the global *doxa* on evaluation in the field of education and the related evaluative policies and practices.

Section 2 - The Critical Ontology of Ourselves as the critical ethos of the archaeological endeavour

To further clarify the critical potential of such an approach, before to address in detail Foucault's archaeology as a method, the lecture will briefly discuss what are the traits that critique assumes in this context. I will refer this to the Foucauldian concept of a critical ontology of ourselves. The critical ethos of the proposed approach consists, in fact, in 'a critique of what we are saying, thinking, and doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault, 1997, p. 315). As such the archaeological analysis that I propose here is not a gesture of rejection based on a value judgement, neither it is an attempt to contribute to the establishment of clear dividing lines between the good and bad educational evaluation or, more, the drawing of another inside/outside divide in relation to educational evaluation. Rather, this is a an exercise of freedom that seeks to 'denaturalize' what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory in relation to educational evaluation, showing how the universal and the necessary are the singular and contingent product of historically arbitrary constraints. As such, this is a movement of freedom which is preliminary (a necessary although not sufficient step) to the exploration of evaluative alternatives in the field of education:

In *What is Enlightenment*, Foucault defines the critical ontology of ourselves as follows:

The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which 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, 1997, p. 319).

What analytics can we employ to carry on the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us as subjects who inhabit the European education area? This becomes the next question addressed in the lecture.

Section 3 - The Archaeological analysis and the wider framework of the governmentality studies

The lecture presents the archaeological analysis of the discourse of school evaluation in Europe as part of a wider attempt to address the question of our educational present and the ways we, as educational subjects, are governed and try to govern ourselves and the others. What I propose here is to frame such a specific analysis adopting the lenses of the governmentality studies (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1991; Peters et al. 2009) and, consequently, treating school evaluation as a form of knowledge and a variety of related techniques that play a central role in the government of education as the ‘conduct of conduct’. Such a perspective adopts the following general definition of government as:

any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seek to shape conduct by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes (Dean, 2010, p. 18).

Government is discussed here as an activity that can be analysed as a set of processes of assembling, contestation and transformation that in turn ‘can be known along four independently varying but related axes: *fields of visibility*; *forms of rationality*; *techniques and technologies*; and *identities and agencies*’ (Dean, 2010, p. 269; see also Rose, 1999; Miller and Rose, 2008). What emerges is an interpretative matrix that is reported in Table 1.

Table 1 – The lenses of governmentality and the problematisation of the educational present

<i>The lenses of governmentality and the problematisation of the educational present</i>				
	<i>Four interrelated axes</i>			
	<i>Episteme</i>		<i>Techne</i>	<i>Ethos</i>
	<i>Fields of visibility</i>	<i>Forms of rationality</i>	<i>Techniques and technologies</i>	<i>Identities and agencies</i>
<i>The analytics of government</i> <i>a materialist analysis of practices of government as assembling processes that involve multiple and heterogeneous elements, that varies from routines, technologies, ways of doing things and agencies to theories, programmes, knowledge and expertise</i>	By what kind of light a field of visibility illuminates and defines certain objects?	What forms of thought, knowledge, expertise, strategies, means of calculation are employed in the practices of governing?	By what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies is authority constituted and governing accomplished?	What forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government?
	With what shadows and darkness it obscures and hides others?	How does thought seek to transform these practices?		What sorts of transformation do these practices seek?
	How are visually and spatially organized the diagrams of power and authority of the regime of government in focus?	How do these practices generate a specific regime of truth?		What statuses, capacities, attributes and orientations are assumed of those who exercise authority and those who are to be governed?
		How does thought attempt to render specific issues, domains and problems governable?		What forms of conduct are expected of them? What duties and rights do they have? How they are ensured?

Source: Grimaldi and Barzanò, 2014; adapted from Dean, 2010.

The lecture highlights how working within this framework means to focus on school evaluation as part of the episteme, as a heterogeneous body of knowledge that is co-implicated in the definition of means of calculation, governing authorities and techniques employed in the governing of education and in the constitution of the entities to be governed, the aims to be pursued and the outcomes and consequences (Dean, 2010, p. 18). In this respect, the analysis proposed in the lecture becomes an attempt to analyze educational evaluation as a key form of knowledge in the government of our educational present, in a perspective that relates politics to ethics, that 'seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons (Dean, 2010, p. 20).

What analytics to employ in order to carry on such an analysis of heterogeneous bodies of knowledge? Here I suggest to take on seriously the methodological grid proposed by Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002b; see also Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982 and Gutting, 1989) for the analysis of discursive formations and to focus on the following processes of constitution:

The Formation of Objects

Discourses socially construct objects. To grasp such processes of construction, the analysis should identify the rules of formation from which the appearance of specific objects and the possibilities of juxtaposition and/or succession between different objects depend. Reframing Foucault proposals (2002b, pp. 44-54), it could be said that such an analysis implies: a) to map the surfaces of their emergence, i.e. those institutional or disciplinary field or those spheres of social life within which discourse defines what it is talking about, give it the status of an object - and therefore make it manifest, nameable, and describable; b) to describe the authorities of delimitation, i.e. institutions, groups of individuals, bodies of knowledge and practice that have the power to delimit, designate or name objects; c) to analyze the grids of specification, i.e. those systems according to which the different objects are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of discourse. Then, mapping the formation of the objects generated by discourse requires to explore the set of relations between authorities of emergence, delimitation, and specification.

The Formation of Enunciative Modalities

Foucault's argument on the formation of enunciative modalities offers some insights on the way discourses produce subjectivities and subject-positions (Foucault, 2002b, p. 55-61). The Archaeology suggests some analytical strategies to explore such productive processes. The first one is the identification of those subjects who have the authority to use a specific language. Such individuals derive their status and prestige from the exclusive use of this (often technical) language and, at the same, guarantee to that language its presumption of truth. The second one consists in the analysis of subjects regulative and traditional statute. In this respect criteria of competence, pedagogical norms and legal conditions connected to that statute, as well as the systems of relations and differentiation between the subjects involved in processes in focus become all crucial objects of analysis. Finally institutional positions from which subjects speak the discourse need to be accurately analysed, being the social 'places' where discourse finds its legitimated origin and its point of application. The analytical moves described need to be closely coordinated with those concerning the formation of objects, grasping the relations between certain subjects-positions and certain groups of objects established by discourse.

The Formation of Concepts

A third crucial analytical strategy in analyzing discourse consists in describing the organization of the field of statements in which policy concepts emerge and circulate (Foucault, 2002b, p. 62). This organisation is articulated through: a) forms of succession, that is different modalities of dispersion of series of policy statements (schemes of dependence, ordering and/or succession); b) forms of coexistence, that define the nature of the relations between recursive and widely used concepts in policy discourse; c) procedures of intervention, that are allowed to be legitimately applied on policy statements, among which it is worth to recall here those of translation, systematization, redefinition and rewriting (the form these processes take varies from one discourse to another).

The distinction Foucault made between different forms of coexistence seems to be of particular interest for the present analysis (ivi, p. 64). He distinguished between: 1) a field of presence, that comprises those already existing statements that, on the one hand, are accepted by a discourse as truth, effective description, reasonable argument or necessary assumption and, on the other hand, are criticised, discussed, judged, refused or excluded. The (explicit or implicit) relations established in this field can be the following: experimental or deductive validation, repetition, acceptance based on authority or tradition, comment, research of hidden meanings, errors' analysis; 2) a field of concomitance, that is the ensemble of statements that concern different objects and belong to different discourses, but exert a function in relation to the statements in focus, acting as points of analogy, general principles, accepted premises, transferable models, imperatives; 3) a field of memory, constituted by those statements no longer accepted but seen as precursors.

The analysis of concepts' formation should aim to determine according to what patterns the statements are linked to each others within a wider discourse that establishes between the concepts themselves forms of deduction, derivation, coherence, incompatibility, substitution, exclusion or reciprocal transformation (ivi, p. 68). The analytical strategy proposed by Foucault is the following: a) to describe a conceptual network on the basis of the intrinsic regularities of the discursive practice; b) to reconstruct the grid of conceptual compatibilities and incompatibilities; c) to relate the emerging conceptual network to the distinctive rules of formation of a discursive practice.

The Formation of Strategies

Many other discursive practices contribute to the definition of objects, subjects and concepts. Then, it becomes crucial to analyze discursive practices as constitutive elements of wider strategies, conceptualized, as Foucault does (2002b, p. 71), as systematically different ways of treating objects, displace enunciative modalities and manipulate concepts. These choices constitutes regulated ways to make actual discursive possibilities.

Foucault offers some suggestions for analyzing those 'actualizations' of discursive possibilities (ivi, p 73). The first is to identify possible points of diffraction within a discursive formation. These points could be characterized as: a) points of incompatibility, that refer to the appearance within the same discursive formation of elements that are contradictory or inconsequent and cannot co-exist in the same series of statements; b) points of equivalence, that establish alternatives from the contraposition of incompatible elements; c) link points of systematization, that represent starting point to derive coherent series of objects, forms of statements and concepts that come to form discursive sub-groups.

Then, discourses need to be interpreted as unities of distribution that «open a field of possible options, and enable various mutually exclusive architectures to appear side by side or in turn» (ivi, p. 73-74). This insight opens a second field of investigation. As Foucault notes, 'but all the possible alternatives are not in fact realized' (ivi, p. 74). The need emerges

to describe the specific authorities guiding each choice and, consequently, the economy of discursive constellation to which each choice belongs. Discourses are in relation to each other and those relations could assume specific characters (i.e. specification, analogy, complementarity or opposition). These characters determine the legitimation or the exclusion of a certain number of statements within a discourse. Moreover, it becomes crucial to describe the ‘function that the discourse (and the ensemble of policies) under study must carry out in a field of non-discursive practices’ (ivi, p. 75) and, consequently, to analyze the relation between the rules of formation internal to a specific discourse and the processes of appropriation of discourse by specific categories of actors who are entitled to speak about its objects and concepts, who access the its field of memory, who are considered able to understand and translate the elements of discourse into decisions, institutions and practices (ivi, p. 76).

This section will end with the specification that in the analysis of the discourse of school evaluation within the European education area, the attention will be mainly directed to one of these processes of formation, the *formation of concepts*.

Section 4 - The case of school evaluation in Europe

In this section the outline provided in Section 1 about the discursive regularities that constitute a transnational discourse of school evaluation is explored in depth, in the light of the research questions developed through the archaeological framework.

In particular, the provisional findings of a research work that is still in progress are presented. The aim is to employ the archaeological method to understand the traits of the epistemological space where school evaluation policies, measures, procedures are thought and the processes of transference from other fields of knowledge that contribute to the formation of such an epistemological space. Such an analysis will at the same time interrogate the conditions of existence of the discourse of school evaluation and its productive effects, which are presented as the two faces of the same medal.

Here, recalling the traits of the critical ethos of the archaeological endeavour, an important point will be made: I am not interested here in presenting the EU vision, neither I am here to discuss a hierarchical-strategic project of control, governing and subjugation. This is much more dispersed and related to how a heterogeneous ensemble of agencies across diverse spaces and localities think, act, analyse and talk about school evaluation, its subjects and objects.

The findings that will be presented during the lecture articulate around the following grid of social regularities:

- a) School Evaluation as part of a wider strategy of Quality Assurance in the field of education
- b) the recursive emergence of an approach to school evaluation that is named as holistic approach
- c) the recurrence of external and internal evaluation as an ordering dualism
- d) the recursive emergence of evaluation models designed on the model of production
- e) school effectiveness and improvement as the main theories that articulate the nexus between the scientific and the policy domain

After showing the evidence of the above social regularities, the analysis will explore what conceptualisations these discursive regularities assume and reproduce.

In answering to this question, I will support the following provisional findings. What emerge here is:

- a) a conceptualization/problematisation of education systems and their parts as failing units;
- b) a conceptualization of school as a productive organisation and schooling as a process of production;
- c) a double and paradoxical conceptualization of the professional as both a producer/object of knowledge and a reflexive knower (what I will call later on with Foucault an empirical/transcendental allotrope);
- d) the production of a normative order framed by an ethics of improvement where the final fulfilment relates to the dream of creating the perfect market.

To support this findings the lecture will take seriously the archaeological level of analysis and will focus on the conditions of existence for the social regularities that constitute the discourse of school evaluation. This means to understand what is the epistemic configuration of the space of knowledge where the heterogeneous statements on school evaluation confront each others and, eventually, struggle.

In my view, this implies, in turn, to reflect seriously on the argument that Evaluation stands as a Human Science, in the terms discussed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* (2002a), that is as a body of knowledge, a set of dispersed statements, a discourse ‘that takes as its object man as an empirical entity’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 375).

Consistently, I will briefly present Foucault’s description of the modern episteme as ‘a volume of space open in three dimensions’ (ibid. p. 378):

- the mathematical and physical sciences, whose aim is to establish an order through the ‘deductive and linear linking together of evident or verified propositions’;
- the sciences of language, life, and the production whose modus operandi is to relate ‘discontinuous but analogous elements in such a way that they are then able to establish causal relations and structural constants between them’;
- philosophical reflection, which develops as a thought of the Same (ibid. 378).

My argument moves from the recognition that evaluation as a body of knowledge and, relatedly, school evaluation find their own place in the ‘interstices of these branches of knowledge’ (ibid. p. 379) and emerge establishing constitutive relations to all the other forms of knowledge that form such a space. As such, evaluation:

- has the project to establish itself, at different levels, a mathematical formalization;
- proceeds through models and/or concepts translated from economy, biology and the sciences of language
- explores some distinctive empirical manifestations of ‘that mode of being of man which philosophy is attempting to conceive at the level of radical finitude’ (ibid. 379).

It is exactly the continuous reference to these three dimensions that constitute its space of existence. At this stage of the analysis, I intend to highlight that there is no doubt that the rise of evaluation as a discipline and as a discourse is strictly related to the complex tangle of governmental processes that develops around the interrelationship between quantification and the government of population. As Rose (1999, p. 199) puts it:

The organization of political life in the form of the modern ‘governmental’ state has been intrinsically linked to the composition of networks of numbers connecting those exercising political power with the persons, processes and problems that they seek to govern. Numbers are integral to the problematizations that shape what is to be governed, to the programmes that seek to give effect to government and to the unrelenting evaluation of the performance of government that characterizes modern political culture.

Many scholars are quite right in criticising the colonisation of evaluation by the pure sciences of the mathematical order and the related processes of quantification. No doubt that evaluation has an inescapable relation with mathematics and the tension towards the application of mathematics to the empirical domain of evaluation can be regarded as a constant of its history as a discipline. However, the perspective I adopt here invites to go beyond such a critique and reflect on the hypothesis that the historical a priori of evaluation is not identifiable in the project of mathesis, i.e. in the constitution of a science that attempts to establish a qualitative ordering in a specific empirical domain, neither in its relation to mathematics.

On the contrary, I suggest to take the position that if we want to fully understand the discourse of school evaluation as it emerges in our educational present, we need to recognize that it has found its constitutive possibility when the problem of governing the man and its activity and, later on, the problem of controlling (and reduce) the uncertainty inherent in human activity were created as a consequence of what Foucault has defined as the rise of man as the central figure in the modern episteme, and then as object of knowledge, with the related opening of the empirical fields of life, labour and language.

My point here is that the distinctive trait of evaluation, in its positivist or anti-positivist emergences, at the epistemic level is not its relation to mathematics but its pretensions of knowing to ‘man in so far as he lives, speaks, and produces’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 383). Then, if one wants then to understand the epistemic conditions of existence for evaluation as a discourse and as a science, one needs to situate it ‘in the vicinity, on the immediate frontiers, and along the whole length of those sciences that deal with life and labour’ (ibid. 383).

Consequently, at this stage, the lecture will propose the argument that, in the case of the formation of the discourse of school evaluation, it is central to focus on a key set of processes of transference of categories, i.e. constitutive models that ‘make it possible to create groups of phenomena as so many objects’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 389) for an evaluative knowledge. It is a specific set of transferences of some central categories from the fields of economy and biology, in particular, that has enabled educational evaluation (and school evaluation in particular) to define in a complex and yet specific way man as its object of study:

1. through transference from *economy* it assumes man as its object of study as a being who has needs and desires, and tries to satisfy them, as a subject having interests who lives in a perennial situation of conflict and creates rules in order to limit/control the conflict (although these rules produce new conflict);
2. from *biology* it has adopted the category of man as living being possessing functions, receiving stimuli from the external environment and reacting to them, a being who is able to adapt, evolve, submit himself to the demands of an environment, but also to come to terms with the modifications it imposes, a being who acts in accordance with regularities and is keen to ‘finding average norms of adjustment which permit him to perform his functions’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 389).

The case of *School Effectiveness and Improvement Research* will be briefly employed as an interesting demonstration of how, despite the specific objects of evaluation, what characterizes evaluation as a discourse, and its sub-fields, is exactly the fact that, in searching for alternative solutions, it looks for them in the epistemological space outlined through these three different translations, whose coordinates define the limits of thought in evaluation.

Discussing the specific traits of the transferences from economy, I will try to highlight how school evaluation, intended as an empirically-based judgement on the value, worth or merit of schools,

professionals and educational processes finds part of its conditions of existence in the transference of the figure of production, a central figure in the modern episteme, and particularly in a basic feature of such a figure: the distinction between labour as ‘energy, toil, and time that are bought and sold’ within a market relation between the worker/producer and a contractor, and ‘the activity that is at the origin of the value of things’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 276). It is such a distinction, fully developed in the economic thought of Ricardo, and in the idea of ‘labour as a producing activity [that] is ‘the source of all value’ (ibid. p. 277) that make thinkable Evaluation as a mode of empirical inquiry that produces judgements about the value of things or entities analysing value as a product of specific forms of production. Moreover, I will argue how the neoliberal rethinking of school evaluation implies a conceptualization of the man of labour as *homo oeconomicus*. Whereas in the discourse of economy, what makes economic activity possible and necessary is a perpetual and fundamental situation of scarcity, and the *homo oeconomicus* is a being who lives in a continuous confrontation with death, evaluation finds its possibility and necessity in a discourse of *man’s fallibility* that locates man in a perennial state of failure. The *homo evaluandus and evaluandum* (a special inflection of the *oeconomicus*) lives his life in the (hopeless?) struggle against failure, a peculiar form of man’s finitude or limitation. Evaluation, as economy, is then strictly related to a discourse of man’s finitude and to ‘an anthropology that attempts to assign concrete forms to [this] finitude’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 280).

Discussing the specific traits of the transferences from biology, I will try to highlight (more briefly than in the case of economy) how the transferences of the organicist concepts of living system and organization provide the key categories to constitute the objects of the evaluative analysis and the related analytical strategies. What evaluation in education submits to (or I should say constitutes through) its modes of inquiry, whatever the level is (system, policy, program evaluation or personnel appraisal), is always thought as a *living system* or as an *organ* of a living system, where different organs and their dispositions are subject to the sovereignty of a *function*, defined in terms of an *effect* to be obtained. In the discourse of evaluation in the field of education *function* is a key device, whereas evaluative analytical strategies tend to identify a limited but necessary number of functions and to define organs and units of the entities under evaluation starting from them (e.g. think about the function of leadership and its centrality in every evaluation check-list and the role it plays in the definition of the value of any activity/organization/subject). Moreover, *functions* become the locus where all the efforts to produce evaluative knowledge are directed. The concept of organization plays a key role as well. *Organization* is conceived here as an internal principle of the living system which is out of the field of visibility. The concept refers to:

- a hierarchy of characters that can be conceived as more or less important in so far as they are linked to the existence of functions that are essential to a living being;
- a multi-layered disposition of the elements/organs that constitute the organization/living system.

As such it operates as a method of characterization, subordinating characters one to another, linking them to functions and arranging ‘them in accordance with an architecture that is internal as well as external, and no less invisible than visible’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 251). Knowing (and evaluating) becomes ‘to relate the visible, to the invisible, to its deeper cause, as it were, then to rise upwards once more from that hidden architecture towards the more obvious signs displayed on the surfaces’ of the living systems.

This explains, in my view, the constant recurrence of two analytical strategies and techniques:

- the ‘anatomic disarticulation’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 294) of an object/entity which is intended as a living system, which in turn allows evaluation to produce a kind of knowledge that

orders entities/living systems along a scale of decreasing complexity and/or on the basis of the perfection/effectiveness of the functional units;

- the use of visible elements as indicators of something which is hidden in the living system, of something that it conceals at a superficial glance, but it is fundamental in so far as it has to do with its *plan, main function (effects)* and the capacity of the living system to accomplish them.

I will also reflect on a further consequence of such a transference. Again, as in the case of economy, the idea that there is a discontinuity, a distinction between the living systems and their conditions of effectiveness, the idea that living systems can be known as organizations that fulfil a function, which in turn can be analytically defined as an effect to be produced, that makes thinkable, and somehow invites to think at, a historicity of living systems (as a declination of the historicity of life) where forces that drive towards the fulfilling of a function struggle against, in a dialectical but never ending manner, the threads of ineffectiveness.

Finally, drawing on the above analysis, I attempt to locate school evaluation as a discourse within a **quadrilateral** that delimits the epistemic space within which it becomes thinkable as a mode of inquiry and as a knowing practice.

- First, man, as object of evaluation, is constituted as a determined subject, a determination coming from positivities that are external to him and as a being living a condition of finitude, which in turn is the condition that makes any true knowledge about man and his activity to emerge. In the discourse of evaluation the finitude of man takes the form of his fallibility and the determination comes from the forms of production and the contextual determinants within which and through which man activity unfolds;
- Second, man appears as a paradoxical figure of knowledge, a peculiar form of empirical-transcendental allotrope, in so far as it is at the same time an externally determined object of knowledge (a being that can be appraised and as such governed) but is also an unlimited knower, an agent who is able to know and control his fate. This creates an oscillation where what is given to evaluative experience is also what makes it possible;
- Third, evaluation presupposes the existence of an unthought (an invisible) which needs (and is waiting) to be brought back to the *a cogito* which is in the condition to unveil it. The process of valuing which underlies any process of evaluation, i.e. the determination of the value, worth or merit of a subject, a process or an entity under evaluation consists exactly in an Enlightenment process of unveiling something which is unthought and hidden to the consciousness of the knowing (but fallible) man;
- Fourth, evaluation gains its value and sense of existence by the promise of improvement, the promise of a completion which assumes the forms of effectiveness, definitive improvement or matching of the objectives in the discourse of evaluation in education.

I argue that the inhabiting of such a space by school evaluation as a discourse has some fundamental implications concerning the form it assumes as a form of knowledge they I briefly define as follows:

- the presumption that evaluation has as a knowing endeavour to ‘tell the truth’ on the merit and value of things, persons and activities.
- the possibility to see in the figure of evaluation a translation of what Foucault has called the ‘modern ethic’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 356), where evaluation implies ‘an imperative that haunts thought from within’ where thought is called to be ‘both knowledge and a modification of what it knows, reflection and a transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects’ (Foucault, 2002a, p. 357).

- A specific relation between evaluation and time, where evaluation (and its transformative ethic that manifests itself in the silent imperative of effectiveness and improvement) assumes (and is based on) a conception of *time as fulfilment* (Foucault, 2002a, p. 371), that can be known as a succession and has a inherently teleological nature.

Concluding remarks

In the conclusion of the lecture I will discuss how the archaeological analysis leaves us with a different and perhaps more complex understanding of the epistemological underpinnings of the discourse of evaluation. But to what extent it offers us the possibility to think otherwise evaluation? The legitimate question would be how to avoid these oscillations that seems to be constitutive of the unfolding of the discourse of evaluation and the short-cuts, the reductionisms, the paradoxes and the frustrations that it produces in the scholarly debate, in the professional world and more generally in the policy and public debate?

A first and reasonable answer could point out to the enemy of reductionism and causal thinking. This is for sure a tough argument and is a key part of the answer.

Nevertheless, this is not the full answer (if a full answer could ever be offered) and, besides, most of the phenomenological explorations in the field of evaluation have frequently faced the same kind of paradoxes. The archaeological analysis invites us to focus on a different, archaeologically more profound, stratum of the conditions of existence for evaluation as a mode of inquiry and reflect on the possibilities open by a deconstruction of them.

I will argue how what we probably need to think about is, within the interstices of the empirical/transcendental paradox, the deconstruction of the *quadrilateral of the discourse of evaluation* and the challenging of the paradoxical figure of man as it is assumed by the discourse of evaluation.

I would suggest the need to question the aspirations of the discourse of evaluation to produce an educational change that is directional and appraisable, being located in a stabilized space and a time sequence. The idea could be to reinforce those evaluative paths ‘that have recently resisted the hegemonic pressures of the evidence-based epistemology and pay close attention to the potentials involved in the practising of those epistemological ruptures that revise the rules in which we understand educational reality and by which we think about educational change and progress’ (Grimaldi, 2015, p. 53). With Popkewitz (1997: 23–24), we could summarize as follows the epistemological ruptures implied by such a questioning:

- rethinking the spatial dimension in the practice of educational evaluative research, focusing on the constructing of identities through the formation of social spaces. As Popkewitz has argued (1997, p. 23), this would be an invitation to evaluation in education to put at the centre of its agenda foci and research questions that concern the ‘rules and standards of reason’ through which subjects are formed in the field of education through their locations within ‘historicizing spaces in a variegated time frame’;
- thinking of time as a multiplicity of strands moving with an uneven flow, understanding change as ruptures or breaks and looking at continuities as conditional and relational. This implies a non-causal and non-linear mode of reasoning that abandons the objective to identify agents and factors of change that move ‘in a continuum from the past to the present and the future’. It calls to an understanding of change and progress that is strictly bounded to ‘breaking the chains of reason that bind and limit alternatives for action’ (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 24);
- escaping from the enduring evolutionary principle that, implicitly or explicitly, continues to inform part of the scholarly reasoning in evaluation and results in the centrality of the logic of comparison and the tendency to create differentiation drawing on ‘some norms of unity’

(Popkewitz, 1997, p. 25). What is suggested here is to intensify in evaluation the exploration of alternative discursive practices to construct differences that do not result in the formation of oppositional norms. This would be coupled with the attempt to position difference within a discourse that does not establish a single continuum of value, but take into account the hybridity, multiplicity and the performative effects of any form of classification and positioning.

This would mean to engage with the contestation of the ‘*anthropological postulate*’ that is at the centre of the contemporary dominant discourse of school evaluation and pursue a decentering of the subject. A decentering of the subject that is nothing more than a ‘historicization of the subject’ and more specifically, a problematization of its constitution as agent, that is at the core of the modern thought. Following Popkewitz (1997, p. 24), ‘rather than identifying power and change in the agents’ this means to give ‘attention to the social construction of [...] knowledge’. Such a ‘turn to knowledge’ as the problematic in evaluative research in education ‘entails a rethinking of the "humanism" that is tied to the a priori identification of agents and the idea of progress as an evolutionary concept’ but is not intended at all to ‘forego social change’. On the contrary, its aim is to ‘relocate the rules on which change and social possibilities are understood’.

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