

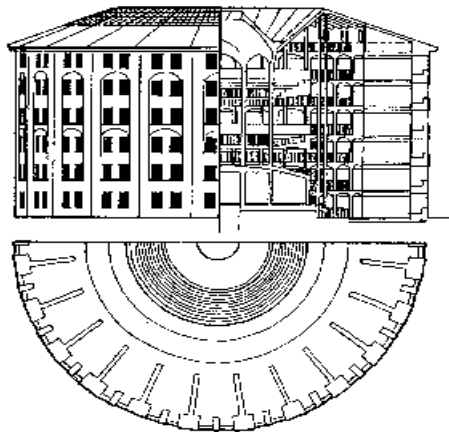
Coercion, Self Regulation and Tertiary Education

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Abstract

Michel Foucault claimed that the apparent neutrality and political invisibility that existed within certain forms of governance allowed power to be exercised with maximum effect because it was hidden from view.

This paper uses Bentham's panopticon as a metaphorical representation of the role and likely impact of recent reforms in New Zealand's tertiary education sector. I have conceptualised a process of Managerial Panopticism to argue that the reforms initiated by the 1999 Labour/Alliance Coalition Government and imposed upon New Zealand's tertiary education sector employ techniques of coercion that provide individuals with a sense of opportunism if they comply. I argue that this sense of 'opportunism' is actually an illusion used by the government to stifle any possible resistance to the reform process.

Key Words: panopticism, New Public Management, tertiary education, stakeholder, compliance.

Introduction

Within the contemporary New Zealand context New Public Managerial discourses claim that an educated society is an essential human resource that promotes nation state status and participation within an implied 'homogeneous' global knowledge society. The Ministry of Education (2002a) believes that in order for New Zealand to remain competitive within this new global context, the tertiary education sector must promote a competitive research ethos and advance New Zealand's human capability through the ongoing development of improved skills and knowledge. In my recent MA thesis (Ashcroft, 2002) I used Bentham's panopticon as a metaphorical representation of the coercive influence of New Public Management on New Zealand's universities and academics by examining the recent Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (2000-2001) led reforms. In this paper I will argue that the reforms initiated by the 1999 Labour/Alliance Coalition Government, imposed upon a tertiary education environment defined and characterised by two decades of neo-liberalism, have particular coercive effects. The metaphorical comparison of Bentham's panopticon, drawn primarily from Michel Foucault's philosophical analysis of the relations of power, is useful in identifying and mapping the complexity of the gaze matrix being created within New Zealand's tertiary education sector under a process that I have called Managerial Panopticism.

The paper is presented in four parts. I begin by outlining the political environment that was created by New Zealand's Labour/Alliance Coalition Government between 1999 and 2002. Next the theoretical underpinnings of the panopticon are described. I then examine self-regulation as a consequence of requirements imposed upon academics to constantly review their role as a teacher and analyse their performance in terms of their research 'output'. This section also examines the relationship between acts of compliance and resistance. Finally it is explained how, under current tertiary education policies and reforms, a self-regulating compliance could create a situation where the 'performance'

and 'output' of the academic seems to take precedence over their actual teaching and research.

The Labour/Alliance Coalition 1999-2002

Leading up to the 1999 general election, New Zealand's Labour Party promoted a 'Third Way' philosophy as part of its pre-election campaign. The Party represented itself as a new direction that would seek to rebuild a nation ravaged by fifteen years of right-wing marketisation. It also promised to forge new community partnerships and create new opportunities that, according to Labour's campaign, would support every single New Zealand citizen in becoming a member of a new and vibrant knowledge society. In critiquing Labour's campaign, Kelsey (2002a, 2002b) argued that where the Party had promised to forge new community partnerships, these partnerships were generally superficial with economic considerations always taking precedence, and that such partnerships actually served to depoliticise the communities rather than strengthen them. Kelsey also criticised the so-called 'knowledge society'. She suggested the nation's capacity to develop the so-called knowledge society was limited while the government remained committed to reducing expenditure on education and training, and while it continued to undermine the innovative potential of the economy through a commitment to globalisation and free trade (Kelsey, 2002a).

During the first year of its tenure the Labour/Alliance Coalition Government remained committed to neo-liberal notions of individualism and choice by supporting economic policies promoted by transnational bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation (Kelsey, 2002a; see also Olssen, 2000; Peters & Roberts, 1999). But unlike the devolutionary governments of the 1980s and 1990s, the Labour/Alliance Coalition supported greater state intervention, generating higher levels of surveillance over both the public and private sectors of society.

This new-found desire to intervene in no way resembled the paternal 'grand-fatherly' role of successive governments of the pre-1984 Keynesian era. During the late 1980s and 1990s neo-liberalism promoted economic prioritisation with an emphasis given to free-market principles and individual agency through the notion of 'choice' (Olssen, 2000). Fitzsimons et al. (1999) argued that neo-liberalism had become a form of government rationality that depended on the façade of a minimalist state infrastructure and the mechanisms of the market to regulate society. This served to promote the individual as an autonomous and rational economic agent whose own success, according to neo-liberalism, existed in their capacity to compete against other autonomous and rational economic agents within this minimalist market-based infrastructure (Ashcroft, 2001; Miller, 2002). According to Fitzsimons et al. (1999) this emphasis on economic prioritisation became the meta-narrative that defined all aspects of New Zealand's public policy by the end of the 1990s, effectively silencing alternative discourses along with those who espoused them. Peters and Roberts (1999) demonstrated this last point by referring to the market-driven 1991 Employment Contracts Act. They argued that the Act served to disenfranchise large sections of the workforce by depleting their collective bargaining capabilities, and to redefine the nature of employment by creating a new 'casualised' workforce for whom job security and protection from exploitation had been seriously eroded. By depleting collective bargaining and undermining a sense of job security, the Employment Contracts Act effectively silenced its intended beneficiaries; New Zealand's workforce.

By 1999 two decades of neo-liberalism had successfully broken down community structures in New Zealand in order to advance the economic agency of the individual. At the outset of the new millennium a

number of western governments, including New Zealand's Labour/Alliance Coalition, began to promote bureaucratic intervention as part of a 'Third Way' commitment to building an all-encompassing 'global' knowledge society. A consequence of this re-imposition of bureaucracy was that it enabled governments to better regulate and control the activities and practices of individuals by undermining the agency of the individual in a redefined world driven by performance and accountability. It is within this political context that a metaphorical comparison of Bentham's panopticon can be useful in identifying and mapping the complexity of the gaze matrix that has been constructed within New Zealand's tertiary education sector.

Panopticism

The panopticon, designed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), was a unique piece of penal architecture that consisted of a ring-shaped building of prison cells that encircled an open area dominated by a central tower. The design created the effect of a perpetual gaze where the occupants of the outer cells were always exposed while the tower's observer remained invisible (Foucault, 1977).

According to Foucault's thesis the subjection of human beings meant that individuals became objects of inexorable modes of surveillance, examination and manipulation in which they, themselves, became agents of their own ongoing subjection (Semple, 1993). Foucault (1977) argued that a continuous gaze as a covert act of surveillance was perhaps one of the most effective ways to exercise power. The gaze functioned in anonymity in such a way that allowed it to become a multiplicity of gazes. A single gaze, hidden but eternal, became thousands of monitoring eyes watching, assessing and classifying. The gaze existed everywhere and for Foucault, panoptic techniques of surveillance had become an integral part of the economic, social and political environments of the western world during the latter part of the twentieth century (Danaher et al., 2000). The panopticon relied upon the illusion of a continuous act of surveillance and the docility created within the observed by the perpetuity of the surveillance (Foucault, 1977).

Peters and Roberts (1999) suggested that New Zealand's contemporary tertiary education sector existed within a realm of westernised capitalism where New Public Managerial modes of inspection, monitoring and review governed the activities and behaviour of individuals. They argued that "societies of control" [panopticon societies] allowed people to be constantly watched beneath the microscope of new and highly sophisticated technologies, scrutinised in a subtle way so as to perpetuate an illusion of individual freedom beneath a ceaseless gaze (Peters & Roberts, p. 89). This, according to Foucault, was the legacy of western capitalism: the creation of the seemingly 'free' individual subject within a society of surveillance (Star, 1999).

The self-regulating gaze

McHoul and Grace (1998, p. 22) defined *subjection* as the "processes of the construction of subjects" within relations of power that "run through the whole of a particular social body". According to Foucault (1982), an individual's actions and behaviour could define their identity. For example, people could be subjected as a consequence of their sexual practices and orientations, their particular moral or religious principles, or by comparing their psychological thinking against widespread accepted 'norms' of appropriate mental functioning (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Any limitations imposed upon the individual as a consequence of their subjection were not solely imposed by external institutions and social bodies, they were also self-imposed through confessional revelations and self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977, 1978).

Within an environment encompassed by panopticism individuals are placed under the perpetual superintendence of delegated authorities and as a consequence, may begin to act in such a way that indicated they felt they were under a continuity of supervision (Star, 1999). Therefore the perpetual gaze of panopticism, once established, does not require constant regulation imposed by a dominant social structure or organisation. Nor does its authority need to be consented to (Star, 1999). It exists and functions by its own inertia. The panoptic gaze is not simply an act of surveillance imposed upon the individual by others; it operates to include the individual as part of its own *modus operandi*. It slowly embraces the individual, influencing them in such a way so that they begin to monitor their own thinking, acting and behaviour. As Peters and Robert's (1999) aforementioned panopticon society slowly encompasses the management of tertiary education in contemporary New Zealand, academics are increasingly required to account for their activities and practices in ways that do not always accurately assess their contribution to the tertiary education sector.

A recording and reporting ethos has become a significant part of the New Public Managerial systems of monitoring and surveillance that have been introduced to New Zealand's tertiary education sector since 1987. New managerial discourses require academics to constantly review their role as a teacher and analyse their performance in terms of their research 'output'. In the case of their role as a teacher, an academic's performance could be rewarded or sanctioned through such acts as promotion or supervision. However, the evaluative mechanisms used to assess the level of an academic's teaching performance will often be based upon such dubious, non-educational indicators as 'bums on seats', per-capita pass rates or government preferences for vocational relevancy. For example, the Labour/Alliance Coalition's Minister of Finance, Dr. Michael Cullen, introduced a performance-related element to the funding of tuition as part of the 2002 Budget. Cullen (2002) argued that the new Student Component would ensure limits on tuition costs through a fee maximum system and that this economic limitation would, according to Cullen, improve the quality and relevancy of tertiary-level teaching.

In terms of their research, an academic's 'output' could be assessed by monitoring how they operated within funding guidelines, acted in accordance with specified goals and objectives (pre-determined without consultation) and produced 'valuable' outcomes where that 'value' had also been determined by economic-based criteria. This could include estimating the immediate marketable potential of the research product or evaluating the charismatic capacity of the researcher and the research in attracting public and media attention and, as a consequence, generating the image of a 'winning' research culture. In *Investing in Excellence* (Ministry of Education, 2002b), the Performance-Based Research Fund Working Group described a potential for researchers to be definitively measured and valued in accordance with the Ministry of Education's stated goals and priorities. According to the Working Group (Ministry of Education, 2002b) researchers resided within a system where everything they did could be monitored for its outcome and usefulness, and where their research existed as an activity of production that could be perpetually increased.

Within this environment the panoptic gaze could be maintained without the need of an external authority to continually enact it. The 'tower' (i.e. Tertiary Education Commission) could remain empty, and in the absence of an inspector the academics could still go about their daily routine in anticipation of the various rewards and/or sanctions that they felt could be imposed upon them by the management systems that governed their practice. They could act and therefore become subjected by their own self-regulation (Ball, 1999). They could produce 'virtual' representations of themselves, crafting curriculum vitae based upon their performances and their outputs (i.e. publications in the 'preferred' journals, course popularity measured in terms of student numbers) and not necessarily upon their actual teaching and research (the Kantian ideal: producing and disseminating knowledge). They could also measure themselves in terms of rewards and sanctions (a promotion 'here' or a loss of research funding 'there'). By doing so, they could risk becoming active and significant participants in their own superintendence by responding to the management systems that governed their practice based upon their own perceptions and assumptions of what those management systems required of them.

According to Ball (1999, p. 4), within this new institutional environment power is exercised through the construction and administration of intricate data-bases, various institutional appraisal processes, ongoing reports, applications for promotion or research funding, audited inspections and peer reviews. With many of these processes having perceived benefits for the individuals over whom they are administered (i.e. a successful job promotion, publication or research grant) it is the continuity of acting, watching, performing, responding, and the way individuals participate within their environment that produces an effect called Managerial Panopticism.

Managerial Panopticism is a process whereby New Public Managerial technologies are used to establish and impose systems of monitoring, inspection and review that seem beneficial to the participatory 'stakeholder' status of individuals. This promotes a sense of opportunity to the individual as a means to gain compliance from the individual. This sense of opportunity is usually conceptualised as an interest or investment in a particular enterprise where the individual has a stake in that enterprise or is dependent upon certain outcomes in relation to the enterprise. By becoming tertiary education 'stakeholders', academics could undergo a process of depoliticisation by inadvertently participating in the decisions that affect the funding and management of the tertiary education sector under the illusion that their collaboration with other tertiary education stakeholders (i.e. government and industry) is likely to produce greater opportunities for themselves. In recent Performance-Based Research Funding policies academics are conceptualised as having an investment in the success and 'output' of their university institution and academic department. As a consequence of this investment most academics are encouraged to comply with the requirements of Performance-Based Research Funding, believing that it is in their interest to secure the best possible result for their institution and department.

An interesting example relating to Performance-Based Research Funding appeared in the October (2002) edition of the *AUS Bulletin* where President of the Association of University Staff (AUS), Grant Duncan, offered strong criticism of the new government proposed funding model for the way it purported to measure research 'performance'. He was also critical of the way Performance-Based Research Funding enabled the Ministry of Education to rate the various universities and their individual departments in terms of their research 'output'. Clearly from a purely academic position, Duncan was opposed to Performance-

Based Research Funding. Nevertheless, in voicing his concerns Duncan (2002, p. 2) recommended that the AUS membership accept and comply with Performance-Based Research Funding with minimal resistance by stating that,

Government is committed to performance-based funding, and probably the best we can do is help to design and execute a system that gives the best basis for comparing performance across research units and ultimately gets the best funding results for research-active universities.

In another example as part of an ongoing Ph.D. research study, Lloyd¹ was asked for his opinion on Performance-Based Research Funding. Like Duncan, Lloyd responded by criticising the funding model for the arbitrary way it appeared to measure research 'outputs'. He went on to argue that the funding model was an extremely narrow measuring instrument and therefore, in his opinion, not necessarily a very accurate gauge. But in voicing his opposition to Performance-Based Research Funding, Lloyd also concluded by advocating a need for compliance.

One of my main criticisms of Performance-Based Research Funding is; in international terms in my discipline, in terms of my scholarship, in terms of my standing; it's irrelevant, entirely and completely irrelevant. However, given that it exists, I will as a Head of Department encourage my colleagues to do the best they can by PBRF, to engage with it, to meet the requirements as best they can and to try and improve their standing for the sake of the department.

Lloyd (2003).

Resistance can appear to support the illusion of opportunity and freedom because the individual's capacity to oppose the system can be referred to as evidence of the apparent acceptability of opposition. But this illusion of freedom could simply serve to further mask the underlying act of coercion and, as such, support its ultimate requirement: compliance. In the November 2003 edition of the *AUS Tertiary Update* the Associate Minister of Tertiary Education, Steve Maharey, claimed that he did not know of a single person in New Zealand who opposed Performance-Based Research Funding.

Nevertheless, there are those working within the tertiary education sector who understand fully that their environment has become one designed to coerce them into compliance. For these individuals one possibility of resistance may exist within their role as the 'critic and conscience' of society. This role enables academics to reposition themselves where they can use their own narrative to create opportunities for individual action (Luberda, 2000). By using their 'critical' voice, academics are able to exercise their agency through the authority of their discourse and as such, create possible spaces for resistance and change (Davies & Harre, 1990; Davies, 1991).

However, although academics are expected to act as the 'critic and conscience' of society, there are limitations to this role. In being society's 'critic and conscience', academics are presented with an opportunity to voice their discontent at ongoing changes

¹ A pseudonym to protect identity. Lloyd is a senior academic currently employed in a New Zealand university.

to the tertiary education sector. But the constituted roles of academics within their university institutions also include expectations of professionalism and associated compliance with government directives and these may confound motivations towards resistance.

Another avenue for resistance may lie within the realisation that panopticism did not always produce docile compliance (Foucault, 1977). Hazeldine (1998) argued that those employed within an environment devoid of trust responded by becoming untrustworthy. But this untrustworthiness is not solely an acceptance of the distrust of the individual by management; it is also an act of resistance. For example, an individual might say:

You want me to work for you and you want me to be loyal to your interests but you will not trust me. I will show you how untrustworthy I can be. I will undermine your managerial impositions at every opportunity.

(The voice of the untrustworthy individual)

In other words, for academics within institutions imbued by a managerial need for compliance there would always be a possibility that the population upon which 'expectations of compliance' were imposed could respond by behaving in a non-compliant fashion.

However, although academics might choose to exercise non-compliant resistance, Foucault (1982, p. 331) saw the coercive capacity of panopticism as a technique of power that could ensnare individuals with the particular "law of truth" that had created their subjection. In order for these academics to create their spaces of resistance they must constitute their role as an 'academic' through the various discourses and practices that serve to objectify what an 'academic' actually is. If the various discourses and practices used by society and government to subject academics have included acts of compliance as part of that subjection, then to be an 'academic' will mean 'to comply'.

Monitoring the Future

After the July 2002 general election a minority Labour Government was formed. This current government remains convinced that economic and social development will be the key factors needed for New Zealand to be able to become a knowledge society. But within the relationship that exists between 'the social' and 'the economic', New Zealand's 'human capability' has been transformed into 'productive capability', 'social capability' and 'economic well-being' (Ministry of Education, 2002c, p. 11).

In the Ministry of Education's (2002a) document *The 2002 Briefing for the Incoming Minister of Education* the same statements that accompanied the reform process for the previous three years (and, to a varying degree, the decade prior to that) continued. According to the Ministry of Education (2002a) New Zealand's universities will have to continue to forge community, business and stakeholder partnerships. The institutions will also need to achieve the right balance between cost and participation and develop an institutional culture that produces relevancy and efficiency in its teaching and research outcomes. In its *Tertiary Education Strategy* for 2002-2007, the Ministry of Education (2002c) has indicated that academics, as stakeholders, need to feel a sense of opportunity and 'belonging' within the tertiary education sector. This sense of opportunity and belonging, according to the Ministry of Education (2002c, p. 9), will enable academics to access the necessary tools that they need to monitor, evaluate and self-regulate their

own activities and practices in accordance with the tertiary education goals and priorities set by government.

In an environment where accountable partnerships with other interests (community, business and 'stakeholders') are created, sector-wide participation is maximised, investment flow is monitored, relevant research and quality teaching are rewarded, and the government's own national developmental goals and education priorities are imposed; a system of Managerial Panopticism begins to emerge. Within this climate the persistent 'red tape' and the endless cycles of evaluations all serve as the 'bitter pill' taken to reputedly improve the health of the institution and the workplace. By accepting the New Public Managerial medicine, academics within the various universities are likely to feel increasingly pressured to comply with the government's prescription for New Zealand's tertiary education sector.

The determination by the Labour/Alliance Coalition Government (1999-2002) and the current minority Labour Government (2002) to build a knowledge society through an advancement of New Zealand's human capability may represent little more than a clinical economic exercise in shepherding human 'stock'. In this context academics are treated like sheep in that they are monitored, managed, measured and evaluated (prodded and probed) as though there is no distinction between one and another. They are 'shepherded' within their institution and throughout their careers so that they learn to think, act and behave in accordance with panoptic managerial systems imposed upon them. Managerial Panopticism exists as a new apparatus of power that employs techniques of coercion that allow individuals to attain a sense of opportunism through an act of compliance whereby that sense of 'opportunism' is actually an illusion used to try and stifle possible resistance and alternative discourses that may otherwise threaten the reform process.

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