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Open co-ordination as advanced liberal government[1]

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ABSTRACT This article applies a Foucauldian analytics of government to recent developments in the European Union (EU), focusing particularly on open methods of co-ordination (OMCs) in the EU. It argues that in the perspective of an analytics of government, the open method of co-ordination can fruitfully be understood as 'advanced liberal government', a particular conceptualization of government constituted of 'practices of liberty'. These practices continuously presuppose, depend on and enable their subjects – in the case of the OMC most often the relevant national government agencies. At the same time, however, they shape and reshape them. There is thus a dual nature to the open method which is typical of advanced liberal government: the method enables and opens up new possibilities for its subjects and at the same time restrains these subjects as they are subjected to a certain calculative and disciplinary regime.

KEY WORDS European Union; Foucault; government; governmentality; power; rationality.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the fruitfulness of applying a Foucauldian 'analytics of government' to recent developments in the European Union (EU), focusing particularly on the evolution of so-called open methods of co-ordination (OMCs). I argue that, in the perspective of an analytics of government, the OMC may fruitfully be understood as an instance of 'advanced liberal government', a particular conceptualization of government constituted of 'practices of liberty'. These practices continuously presuppose, depend on and enable their subjects – in the case of the OMC most often the relevant national government agencies. At the same time, however, they shape and reshape them. There is thus a dual nature to the open method which is typical of advanced liberal government: the method at the same time enables and opens up new possibilities for its subjects, and restrains these subjects as they are made subjects of a certain calculative and disciplinary regime.

The article first relates the concept of an analytics of government to the frequently used concept of 'governance' and the related image of the EU as a

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system of multi-level governance. Secondly, I illustrate the implications of an analytics of government in understanding the system of the OMC, drawing in particular on examples from the economic and the labour market policy fields. I confront a 'conventional' understanding of the OMC as the outcome of an interplay between actors with given interests with a notion of the method as an expression of a broader current of understandings of governance in contemporary liberal societies. The instruments of the OMC are described as specific instances of the technologies of advanced liberal government, and the particular notion of freedom implied in these technologies is identified. I also suggest that, in the perspective of an analytics of government, the OMC can be seen as expressing the existence of a European identity, in so far as the method embodies a conception of a certain 'community of destiny' between the member states of the EU.

In the final section, I take up the discussion of the importance of the OMC. Rather than focusing on behavioural effects, relevant concepts from the point of view of an analytics of government could be those of *significance*, *empowerment* and *constrainment*, just as an analysis of mentalities of government in the EU opens up possibilities for both a deconstructive criticism and for a constructive identification of the possible and the less possible.

2. GOVERNMENT, GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENTALITY

Some time ago now, the term 'government' gave way to the concept of 'governance' as a prominent tool for analysis of public policy. The specific juncture where this happened is difficult to identify. However, 'governance' seems to have gained prominence in parallel with the dispersion of an understanding of rule in late modern societies as a decentred rule. Max Weber's traditional definition of the modern state as an 'organized relation of power which succeeds in upholding within an area a monopoly of legitimate use of violence as a political means' (Weber 1971: 8; my translation) may thus be confronted with a conception of the contemporary state as a 'historically specific and contingent self-reproducing structure', 'a mediating actor', a 'structure of assumptions about the activities and intentions of others' (Cerny 1990: 98–9). Whereas the concept of government understood as a political process of 'authoritative allocation of values' (Easton 1979) reflects a notion of the unified state, comprising a single locus of power, governance as 'processes of steering and co-ordination' or as 'co-ordination through networks' reflects a movement towards an understanding of dispersed power taking various formal or informal institutional shapes.

In studies of the EU, the application of the concept of governance has taken a specific form, as the EU has increasingly been understood as an instance of 'multi-level governance' (e.g. Marks 1993; Christiansen 1997). In relation to general understandings of governance, this conception is specific in one important respect, namely in reproducing and reifying a notion of politics as operating on separate planes. Thus, whereas the term 'governance' is often

used to encompass a process of co-ordination through networking, without regard to different 'planes' of politics, the concept of multi-level governance presupposes precisely the existence of such separate planes, even if processes of will-formation may or may not take place in an interaction between different 'planes' (cf. Diez 1999: 604–5).[2]

What I propose here is to adopt a different understanding of government/ governance in studying the EU. This is a Foucauldian 'analytics of government', and a focus on the 'governmentalities' of European governance. Applying this perspective to studies of the EU may be seen as a continuation of the movement towards an understanding of power as dispersed and multifaceted and of governance as involving both formalized, institutionalized and informal processes of co-ordination and will-formation. However, the concept of governance is often still taken to refer to the formation and exertion of binding commitments or the allocation of values (e.g. Jacobsson 2001: 3; Eising and Kohler-Koch 1999: 5). This implies that eventually and in a certain sense, a single locus of power is formed after all. This is not necessarily the case where the perspective is a Foucauldian analytics of government. For in this perspective, government may be seen as the 'conduct of conduct', that is:

> 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 seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.
> (Dean 1999: 11)

Whereas this is a very broad, even if precise, definition it has several implications. Government here concerns some sort of attempt to deliberate on or direct human conduct. And an analysis of government may then be focused on the rationalities which are involved in this deliberation or direction: the means of calculation, the type of governing authority or agency, the various forms of knowledge and the various techniques which are employed, and the governed entity and the way it is conceived.

The definition thus points to two important foundations for an analytics of government: the rejection of the problematique of sovereignty and the rejection of notions of a single and universal rationality. As for the problematique of sovereignty (the relation between the sovereign and its subjects, the state and its citizens), this involves a whole set of assumptions and questions which in effect locks the analysis into a certain domain. This domain is demarcated by an understanding of power as something definite and easily identifiable, a matter you can possess or not possess, and by questions which focus on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of power. Hereby attention is drawn away from an investigation into the actual workings and manifestations of power relations (Foucault 1984: 82–90; 1994: 26–7, 32–4).

As for the question of rationality, the problematique of sovereignty is often intimately related to a conception of rationality in which power and rationality

are opposites and in which rationality is seen to have a specific and universal character, aligning it with 'truth', 'knowledge' and 'the good'. For instance, in classical liberal political theory public reasoning was to enable the replacement of the rule of 'voluntas', the arbitrary rule of the absolutist monarch, with the rule of 'ratio' (Habermas 1989). This notion presupposes both the existence of a universal rationality, which can be readily identified, and its opposition to power. Modern reformulations of this line of reasoning, for instance, the whole body of literature on deliberative democracy (e.g. Habermas 1996), continue to reproduce the opposition between power and rationality and to presuppose the existence or the possibility of a definite rationality with some universal or quasi-universal foundation (Haahr 2000: 34–5).

Against this background, the Foucauldian perspective employs a strategy of 'bracketing': any notions of the definite or unequivocal nature of power are set aside, enabling an analysis of a field which would otherwise in effect to a large extent be black-boxed, namely by the (conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit) assumptions which guide our analysis and the questions we ask when assuming the sovereign, state-centred, model of power. Similarly, the questions to ask about power are not those about its legitimacy for even if these questions are important, they stand in the way of an investigation into what power is, and how and through which mechanisms it evolves. The same line of argument applies to notions of rationality: if we set aside the assumption that there is a definite rationality or set of rationalities with some universal founding, we open up the analysis to an investigation into the actual rationalities which are at play in a given setting, their foundations, the techniques they rely upon, their 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133).

As a consequence of these manoeuvres, the relation between power and rationality is not seen as an opposition. For if there are numerous possible rationalities relying on separate regimes of truth, and if rationalities are variable phenomena, they may also have the effects of power. There are no relations of power which are not at the same time related to a field of knowledge (Foucault 1977: 27–8; 1980: 133).

The strategy of bracketing has as a consequence that 'how' and 'what' questions become important. The advantage of these questions is that they are not to the same extent as, for instance, 'why' questions bound up with a set of definite assumptions which both provide the starting point for analysis and define the space within which possible answers must fall. On the contrary, they open up possibilities for examining precisely the assumptions which are relied upon in a given line of reasoning. Hence, as Dean (1999: 23) puts it, 'an analytics of government takes as its central concern *how* we govern and are governed within different regimes, and the conditions under which such regimes emerge, continue to operate and are transformed.' The concept of 'governmentality' in this connection deals with how we think about government, the relation between government and thought, thinking being viewed as a collective activity and mentalities as bodies of knowledge, belief and opinion.

What are then the objectives of an inquiry at these levels? The aim is clearly different from, for instance, analyses which take some rationalist or positivist starting point and harbour explanatory ambitions or which seek to pass judgements on the world with the use of some global normative yardstick. An analytics of government has a more local aim. It marks out a space to ask questions about government, authority and power without attempting to formulate a set of general principles by which various forms of 'the conduct of conduct' could be reformed. The point is not to constitute a 'value-neutral' social science, but to practise a certain form of *criticism*, a criticism which seeks to 'shed light where there is shadow', to make explicit the thought that is largely tacit in the way in which we govern and are governed, and in the language, practices and techniques by which we do so. In doing so, we can remove the taken-for-granted character of these practices and hence open up possibilities of 'thinking and acting differently' (Foucault 1985: 9).

This is, in other words, a deconstructive exercise. I would add, however, that it is also possible to include a certain constructive ambition within an analytics of government. For analysis of the tacit or explicit foundations of government also enables us to identify the possible and the less possible: when we identify the taken-for-granted rationalities and structures of meaning which are relied upon in specific governmentalities, we also identify the limits of what is meaningful and less meaningful, and hence how and what it is possible and less possible to think and do.

Dean (1999: 23, 30–3) identifies four useful dimensions in relation to the 'how' questions of an analytics of government: visibilities, knowledge (episteme), techniques and practices (techne), and identities. An analytics of government tries to recover the intelligibility of regimes of practices through each of these dimensions, without falling into any kind of reductionism or determinism, for each dimension presupposes the others without being reducible to them.

As regards the dimension of *visibility*, we may ask by what kind of light (drawings, flow charts, maps, graphs, tables, etc.) a field illuminates and defines certain objects and with what shadows and darkness it obscures and hides others. The dimension of the *techne* of government asks the question by what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies authority is constituted and rule accomplished. Technical means, i.e. instruments applied to achieve specific objectives, are in this perspective seen as a condition of governing and often impose limits over what it is possible to do. The dimension of the *episteme* of government is concerned with the forms of thought, knowledge, expertise, strategies, means of calculation or rationality that are employed in the practices of governing. How do these practices of government give rise to specific forms of truth, and how does thought seek to render particular issues, domains and problems governable? A fourth dimension concerns the forms of individual and collective *identity* through which governing operates and which specific practices and programmes of government are formed. What forms of person, self and identity are

presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformation do these practices seek?

A further line of inquiry may be useful: the extraction of the utopian element of government. For mentalities of government contain a certain utopian element: to govern is to do more than simply exercise authority. It is to believe that it is possible to achieve desired ends through government, that it is possible to re-form human beings, and 'make things better' (Dean 1999: 12). The question to ask, in this respect, is what are the ultimate ends, the utopian goals, of regimes of government, the *telos* of government? Every theory or programme of government presupposes an end of this kind, a type of situation, organization or society which is to be achieved.

3. THE OMC AS ADVANCED LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

How, then, may we interrogate the OMCs of the EU from the perspective of an analytics of government? First of all, an analytics of government asks a different set of questions than what would seem relevant from a 'rationalist' perspective. In such an account, the question of causal mechanisms as explanations would often be important: why has the system of open co-ordination developed at this particular point and why does it consist of these specific elements? The particular instruments of the OMC are not, on the other hand, an aspect which has attracted too much attention, and it seems that it is beyond the scope of rationalist accounts to attempt any deeper understanding of the specific design of the system which has evolved. Wallace (2000: 33), for instance, laconically remarks that the approach of co-ordination is 'strengthened by the contemporary fashion for "benchmarking"'. Benchmarking (systematic comparisons, most often in relation to some 'best practice' or 'market leader') may indeed be seen as a 'fashion', but may it not also, in the context of the OMC, be understood as an expression of a subtle but at the same time much more pervasive change in the conduct of conduct than the word 'fashion' would lead us to believe?

An analytics of government gives prominence to a set of 'how' and 'what' questions where precisely the specific design of the system and its mechanisms, technologies and rationalities are in focus. Furthermore, even though the OMC is, compared to the communitarian methods of regulation, a recent development, its governmentality must be understood in conjunction with wider developments as regards ways of thinking and doing governance in contemporary societies.

What are the elements in this governmentality, judged from the various components of the OMCs? It comprises a specific set of visibilities and technologies. Its rationality is a calculative rationality inscribed within a broader governmentality of a modern management, discipline and development of populations, the utopian element of which points to human society as some 'efficient machinery of performance'. However, far from constituting a set of illiberal or authoritarian practices, OMCs can be seen as an expression of

advanced liberal forms of government. These are forms of government which embody a notion of structured and conditioned freedom, and which govern through the manipulation of techniques and mechanisms, rather than more directly through the classical liberal or Keynesian welfarist manipulation of processes, or the early modern 'dispositional ordering of things'. Advanced liberal government is a reflexive 'government of government'.

Advanced liberalism

Dean (1999: 150–9, 164–71) tells the story of the evolution of advanced liberal government from the perspective of the nation state. Advanced liberal rule is, among other things, characterized by a changing relation between citizens as individuals and in their associations, on the one hand, and the national state, on the other hand, and by the changing conceptions of the meaning of society in this connection. In the Keynesian, 'welfarist' mentality of rule, government is understood as an activity undertaken by the national welfare state acting as a unified body upon and in defence of society. Society is, in turn, viewed as a unitary domain, separate from government, and the purpose of government is to provide security in this domain through economic regulation and the provision of insurance, social insurance, health insurance or other forms. Society is regarded as a source of needs that are individually distributed and collectively borne.

The rise of neo-liberal conceptions, as well as of the 'alternative' political programmes which arose in response to them, challenges this construction. When UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1987 proclaimed the non-existence of society, the effect was to recast the understanding of society as a domain of needs, calling for regulation and insurance, to a domain of energies, contained within individuals' exercise of freedom and self-responsibility (Thatcher 1987: 10; 1993: 626). This is a notion which is by now barely contestable and shared across the political spectrum. The changing understanding of 'society' in turn makes possible a government which is not the government of society in the welfarist sense: no longer that of securing a set of social, economic and demographic processes, the basic problem of government becomes one of securing governmental mechanisms; acting through 'free subjects' and their associations, government consists of establishing and securing the mechanisms which can effectively unleash the energies of society.

However, in advanced liberal government the 'freedom' of these subjects has an ambivalent quality – for these are subjects whose freedom is a condition of subjection and whose subjection is a condition of freedom: on the one hand, the exercise of authority in advanced liberal societies presupposes the existence of a free subject of needs, desires, rights, interests and choice. There can be no authority without subjects who can consent to it and thereby provide it with its quality. On the other hand, in order to act freely the subject must first be shaped, guided and moulded into one capable of responsibly exercising that freedom. Subjectification and subjection, the fabrication of subjectivities and

domination, are laid upon one another. In this sense, advanced liberal practices are 'practices of liberty', practices which establish and facilitate liberty but which also discipline and constrain the exercise of it: they contract, consult, negotiate, create partnerships, empower and activate forms of agency, liberty and the choice of individuals in their different capacities. However, they also set norms, standards, benchmarks, performance indicators, quality controls and best practice standards, to monitor, measure and render calculable the performance of these various individuals or agencies. Thus the concept of a 'free subject' has in advanced liberal government taken on the meaning of a potential technical instrument in the achievement of governmental purposes and objectives, of being an entity which can be constructed and shaped by governmental practices. Advanced liberal rule operates through our freedom, through the way this freedom is structured, shaped, predicted and made calculable.

Let me tell this story again from a European perspective, for we find a number of familiar characteristics in the mentalities of rule of the EU. Indeed, the character of OMCs makes sense as an example of a broader current, a change in the mode of thinking about government which corresponds closely to the changing conceptions of citizen–nation state relations and the character of society in advanced liberal societies. The earlier, even if still significant, idea of establishing and facilitating the operation of markets via regulatory action, such as the removal of customs and other barriers to trade and the harmonization of national regulation across the EU, may be understood as reflecting a liberal ambition of government through the manipulation of social or economic processes. It is via co-ordinated and binding juridical and regulatory action that the proper conditions for the functioning of market processes are to be secured at the European level (Haahr and Walters 2003). The OMC backs down from this objective.

Instead, the objective is formulated as 'to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies', just as the method is described as 'a fully decentralised approach in line with the principle of subsidiarity' and a method in which 'the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership'.

In this last formulation we can identify the notion of society as a pool of resources, the energies of which can be released through the use of partnerships. This is a notion which is also found in the statement that 'a method of benchmarking best practices on managing change will be devised by the European Commission networking with different providers and users, namely the social partners, companies and NGOs' and in the formulation that the achievement of the Union's strategic goals 'will rely primarily on the private sector, as well as on public–private partnerships'. Here, the Union's role will be 'to act as a catalyst in this process, by establishing an effective framework for mobilising all available resources for the transition to the knowledge-based economy' (European Council 2000).

Technologies of agency

These formulations also point to the significance accorded to various *technologies of agency* in the OMC (Dean 1999: 167). Technologies of agency are contemporary technologies of government that seek to enhance or deploy our possibilities of agency. A distinction can be made between two aspects of these technologies: a 'new contractualism' (Yeatman 1998), and a set of 'technologies of citizenship' (Cruikshank 1993, 1994).

The former consists of the proliferation of extra-juridical and quasi-juridical forms of contracts, found, for instance, in the 'contracting out' of public services to private companies or community agencies, or in 'performance agreements' or 'development contracts' agreed between central government agencies and more decentral providers of public services, between the public employment services and the unemployed, between schools and pupils, etc. The latter consists of the multiple techniques employed for the purpose of empowerment and involvement of specific groups or individuals in consultation and negotiation, techniques of 'voice' and 'representation' (Yeatman 1994: 110) by which the claims of groups can enter into a process of negotiation over needs and requirements, in contexts as diverse as community development, health promotion, teaching, community policing, the combatting of dependency, etc. Through the employment of these technologies, agency is produced and is inserted into a specific system of purpose.

Whereas contractualism does not take on an explicitly juridical form in the system of open co-ordination, we can nevertheless identify elements of this particular technology. For the Lisbon summit's commitment to 'a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' (European Council 2000) is coupled with a set of specific requirements in a range of areas, addressed to a range of actors. Indeed, the entire document presenting the Lisbon Presidency Conclusions appears as a quasi-contract, a text which, at one and the same time, specifies the results (albeit often in vague terms) to be delivered at the end of the contract period (2010) and the requirements this imposes on the various parties involved.

A contract mentality can also be found when looking at other specific elements of the OMC, in the labour market field, for instance, of the Employment Guidelines (e.g. Council 2001, 2002). The contractual element consists of the formulation of objectives which are contained in these Guidelines and in the obligations specified in conjunction with the intention to attain these objectives. The document thus stipulates in writing a set of mutual commitments, at the same time leaving it to the committed parties to decide on the measures that are required to live up to these commitments.

As for 'technologies of citizenship', these are perhaps better reformulated as 'technologies of involvement' in the context of the EU. For as soon as we change our perspective from the focus on citizens and state, individuals and authority, to a focus on forms of governance transcending nation state

boundaries, subjects more frequently appear as associations, agencies or institutions than as individuals.

Yet, regardless of whether the situation is one of the active involvement of citizens in community development or of the engagement of ministerial bureaucracies or 'social partners' from different states in common processes of deliberation, the technologies employed share certain characteristics: the presupposition that government is the employment of techniques for the release of resources found in a domain outside government itself. And just as 'technologies of citizenship' actively construct individuals as active citizens, conscious consumers, or members of self-managing communities and organizations, the 'technologies of involvement' of the OMC construct the involved parties as active participants in common projects, as co-constructors of 'the European economy'. In terms of governmental rationalities and technologies, the parallels of the OMC and, for instance, the contemporary methods for the management of national welfare states are clear. This is so regardless of the different nature of 'subjects' in the two contexts.

The OMC's most prominent technology of involvement is perhaps its systematization of the creation and exchange of knowledge, the comprehensive possibilities it establishes for deliberation, consultation and negotiation, both within each member state and between states. In conjunction with the broad objectives and wide range of fields now covered by procedures of open coordination, this systematization means the active involvement of whole new groups of primarily civil servants at a national level in processes of European 'opinion formation', individuals who have otherwise only rarely formed an active part in decision processes with a European dimension (cf. Jacobsson 2001: 8).

Technologies of performance

In this manner, the OMC's technologies of agency rely upon and reconfirm the existence of 'free subjects', not as individual citizens but as active participants with the possibility of contributing to the shaping of 'the European economy'. However, this freedom is a contingent freedom, for in conjunction with the various technologies of agency we find an equally important set of *technologies of performance.* In a nation state context, these technologies can be viewed as the plural technologies of government designed to penetrate the substantive domains of expertise fostered under the welfare state and to subsume these domains (of the nurse, the doctor, the teacher, the social worker, etc.) to new formal calculative regimes (Rose and Miller 1992). Budget devolutions, benchmarking exercises, best practice examples and the setting of performance indicators are thus all examples of more or less technical means of locking the shaping of conduct into the optimization of performance.

These technologies of performance are, then, utilized as an indirect means of regulation, of ensuring performance in the form of efficiency, effectiveness or quality, measured in terms of production, productivity or satisfaction.

Professionals, in turn, are transformed into 'calculating individuals' within 'calculable spaces', subject to particular 'calculative regimes' (Miller 1992). The enormous growth in the use of the audit method, noted in Power (1994), is a particular element of these technologies of performance, a situation in which various indicators and measurements are brought to bear in one exercise during which agencies or professionals are subjected to a comprehensive 'gaze', a scrutiny of abilities to fulfil moral and political requirements.

Whereas the technologies of performance found in the OMC cannot be viewed directly in parallel, as related to a problematique of control with the domains of expertise of the welfare state, they are nevertheless present at the very core of the method: the constitution of new deliberative spaces cutting across traditional boundaries and the establishment in this manner of new possibilities of involvement is one significant element. But equally important is the systematics of peer review, the systematization of comparisons and evaluation, and the repeated call for performance indicators, for the quantification of objectives and hence for the establishment of their measurability.

In the formulations of the Lisbon summit, the implementation of the strategic goal of competitiveness and dynamism will thus be ensured by fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving short-, medium- and long-term goals; by establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world as a means of comparing best practice; and by periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review. The document specifically calls for benchmarking and performance indicators concerning national research and development policies, innovation, the development of human resources, barriers for the establishment of companies and attracting capital, for life-long learning practices and flexible management of working time and job rotation, and for childcare provision. Similarly, a number of objectives are presented directly in quantified form: a halving of the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education by 2010; an increase in the average rate of employment from 61 per cent to as close as possible to 70 per cent by 2010; an increase in the number of women in employment from 51 per cent to more than 60 per cent by 2010.

And perhaps the parallelism to the problematique of control in the welfare state is more pervasive than what appears at first sight. Are we not seeing a specific system of indirect 'government at a distance' being established with the OMC – not with the objective of penetrating the knowledge domains of traditional welfare state professionals, but with the objective of penetrating the knowledge domains and the national frame of reference of member state bureaucracies? A system which transforms its participants into 'calculative individuals' within a specific 'calculative space', namely the notion of a European economy.

Indeed, can we not view the various technologies of performance of the OMC as elements in a disciplinary regime, a system of surveillance, of 'panopticism' (cf. Gill 1995, 2001)?:[3]

> Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; . . . in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so.
>
> (Foucault 1977: 201)

At least, it would seem that it is very much this disciplinary power which is at play in the OMC; not a sovereign power which by force and violence throws the inmate into the dungeon, but a 'capillary power' which works through the minds of the inmates, which serves to induce a certain consciousness and behaviour by the sheer presence of surveillance.

Visibilities and identities

In sum, then, the simultaneous presence of techologies of agency and technologies of performance in the OMC spells out a European restatement of an advanced liberal notion of freedom. For OMCs are indeed compatible with the principle of subsidiarity (cf. the European Council 2000). It might even be considered a specific expression of it. And the principle of subsidiarity may in turn be seen as a specific form of freedom, namely the possibility of choice in the specific institutional space of the European nation state, and as a respect for this possibility of choice. However, in the context of the OMC it is also a constrained and structured freedom. By entering into a system of open co-ordination, member states, their bureaucracies, their agencies and civil servants, have also subjected themselves to the surveillance, scrutiny and evaluation of others in new domains, with a view to arriving at certain common objectives.

The *field of vision* found in conjunction with OMCs reflects these ambivalent characteristics. The OMC's field of visibility establishes a domain which makes possible development, exchange of experience and co-operation. This is done through tables and graphs which display and compare information across member states, cf., for example, Tables 1 and 2. But at the same time, this field of visibility is in itself a technology of performance, an element in the surveillance to which participants expose themselves.

The grid of visibilities in connection with the Lisbon process has become a dense grid. As the objectives of the Lisbon Presidency Conclusions have been operationalized into quantitative indicators and targets, and as the number of targets in the Lisbon process have increased, so the instruments and technologies for visualizing progress towards them have increased in numbers as well. For instance, the 2003 'Spring Report' staff working paper of the Commission, which scrutinizes the progress of the member states towards the stated

Table 1 Summary of assessments of member state progress (Commission 2003b: 31)

	Public finances	*Labour markets*	*Product markets*
Belgium	some	some	some
Denmark	good	some	good
Germany	limited	limited	some
Greece	some	some	some
Spain	some	some	some
France	limited	some	some
Ireland	some	some	some
Italy	limited	some	some
Luxembourg	some	some	limited
Netherlands	some	some	some
Austria	limited	limited	some
Portugal	some	some	some
Finland	some	some	limited
Sweden	good	good	some
United Kingdom	some	some	good

Note: Summary of the Commission's assessment of progress made in relation to the countries' specific recommendations within the 2002 Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

objectives, contains more than one hundred pages of graphs, most of them organized according to a similar principle: that of comparing the performance of each member state to that of the others, and notably also to the performances of the United States and Japan. Where the Lisbon process has resulted in the specification of a specific target, the performance or progress of each state is also compared graphically to this target (Commission 2003a).

Several other points can be made in relation to these visibilities and their underlying rationalities. First, the grid of visibilities and the governmental rationality of which they form a part produces a notion of government as a strategic activity and of member states as agents capable of devising strategies and achieving objectives. This is a notion which can be found throughout the documents of the Lisbon process. The subtitle of the Commission's spring 2003 report to the European Council, for instance, indicates that it is a report on 'the Lisbon strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal'. It is indeed a key element in the Lisbon Presidency Conclusions themselves, and it is an element which is particularly clearly illustrated in Table 2: when member states' positions on developing lifelong learning strategies are deemed adequate, partial or insufficient, as regards the comprehensiveness and coherence of strategies, the presupposition is the need for a comprehensive and coherent strategy, and for government to be a strategically oriented and coherent activity.

Virtue, the objective towards which member states strive, therefore consists of an ability to develop and implement good strategies. Government is

Table 2 Member states' positions on developing lifelong learning strategies (Commission 2001)

Characteristics	*BE*	*DK*	*GER*	*GR*	*SP*	*FR*	*IRL*	*IT*	*LUX*	*NL*	*AU*	*POR*	*FIN*	*SW*	*UK*
COMPREHENSIVENESS OF STRATEGIES															
Compulsory education	P	A	A	P	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	P	A	A	A
Formal adult education/training	P	A	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	A	A	A
Workplace/other non-formal recognized a priori learning	P	A	A	P	P	A	P	P	I	P	P	P	A	A	A
Focus on disadvantaged groups	P	P	P	A	I	P	P	I	P	P	P	P	A	A	P
Overall investment/funding schemes	P	A	P	I	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	A	P
COHERENCE OF STRATEGIES															
System development (policy needs, planning, targets, implementation, monitoring)	P	A	P	P	P	A	P	I	P	A	P	P	A	A	P
Partnership working (social partners, public authorities, learning providers, civil society)	P	P	A	I	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	A
Cross-cutting aspects (advice/guidance services, education/training mobility)	P	A	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	I	I	A	P	A

Notes: A = Adequate. 'Adequate' denotes that a particular criterion is given appropriate priority in the member state's strategy and in concrete action. P = Partial. 'Partial' indicates that some attention is given to the criterion in both strategy and actions *or* that it is given appropriate priority in one or the other. I = Insufficient. 'Insufficient' refers to when the particular criterion is absent from the strategy and the actions or is given some attention in one or the other.

purposeful and intentional management, being directed by a number of overall, long-term objectives. It is not, for instance, an activity predominantly guided by a concern for the protection of rights, for freedom or for justice or security. Concerns such as those may form part of the long-term objectives which government or EU strategies are targeting, of the utopian element of government. What emerges from the OMC's grid of visibilities is, however, the saliency of *strategy* as a specific governmental technology.

Seen from this perspective, the mentality of the Lisbon process is inscribed within a different and wider narrative. This is a narrative of self-improvement via purposeful self-control and conscious self-management, and it reflects at the level of national and international agencies and bureaucracies a predominant construction in contemporary societies of subjects as responsible, rational and self-controlling entities, responsible also in the sense of having responsibility for their own destinies and being both able and obliged to turn themselves into 'successful' achievements.

Second, tables and graphs construct a set of *identities* which are continuously reproduced in the framework of the Lisbon process: the European Commission as an institution capable of legitimately and authoritatively passing out grades to member states, thereby establishing their relative forwardness or backwardness in terms of achieving virtue; and member states as entities engaged in a process of competitive self-improvement. All member states are positioned as being in a process of moving towards the attainment of different targets and objectives. At the same time, the tables in themselves and the assessments upon which they often rely lend themselves to comparisons and rankings. Indeed, the Commission itself actively promotes this competitive mentality in various instances, for example by highlighting the frequency with which various member states are placed among the top or bottom three performers in respect of the 'structural indicators' of the Lisbon process (Commission 2003b: 30).

The grid of visibilities, the existence of various underlying structural indicators, and the constant and systematic comparison of member states' performance in relation to them, serve to reinforce one further particular identity: the notion of Europe as an entity. Evidently, this is a notion which is found in many EU/European Community publications from different contexts and earlier periods. The point about the OMC, however, is that it reflects a very broad notion of a European identity. The structural indicators of the Lisbon process now encompass a comprehensive range of measuring points: there are indicators on the member states' 'general economic background' and on particular employment trends, on innovation and research, and on 'economic reform'. A fifth set of indicators pertains to 'social cohesion', and a final set to the environment (Commission 2003a).

All these indicators contribute to the production of a specific European identity, for their significance is to construct 'the economy', 'economic reform', 'social cohesion' and 'the environment' as a space of specific EU problems. They all presuppose that it is meaningful and natural to conceive of these

problems as common EU problems and of their solutions as common solutions. It is not implied that solutions must be found through conventional 'communitarian' tools such as common EU legislation. But it is implied that solutions are to be developed in a European context, drawing upon experience and knowledge of other EU member states and their representatives, or of European institutions such as the Commission.

The idea of the EU as some 'community of destiny' is thereby confirmed in novel ways; as an entity within which it is natural and almost self-evident to conceive of a new range of problems and possibilities as common, European, problems and possibilities, and to seek solutions in a common process. When it becomes both legitimate and natural to speak of an EU benchmark with respect to the female employment rate or the youth unemployment ratio, for instance, or with respect to the proportion of early school leavers, to take another example, it is implied that these figures are meaningful as European figures: that the level of female or youth employment or the proportion of early school leavers is indeed a common European concern.

The self-evidence of a broad European identity is contestable. Why is it that female employment is specifically and necessarily a concern in an EU context? Could a good case not be made for the problem of early exit from the educational system as a national or even a local concern, more than a European one? More generally, systems of open co-ordination could meaningfully be applied in many other contexts than specifically within the EU. But even if it is possible to identify examples of open co-ordination in other settings, for example the Baltic Sea area (Arbejdsministeriet 1999), the method remains largely a matter for the EU. This is a strong indication of the existence of notions of a broad and comprehensive European identity, as a community among states for whom it is particularly relevant and *natural* to exchange experiences, encourage each other, make comparisons, etc. It may be that a notion of a European identity has not gained a foothold among the European populations at large. At the level of EU policy development, the OMC serves to illustrate its significance (cf. also Hueglin 1999: 264).

The utopian element

Third, the *moral element*, understood as knowledge of what constitutes good, virtuous, appropriate or responsible conduct, stands out clearly, from Tables 1 and 2 and in general from the underlying targets, indicators and objectives. Table 1, for one thing, suggests that virtuous and responsible conduct is related to a certain functioning of specific domains of the economy: public finances, labour markets and product markets. Table 2 likewise points to the management of populations as a resource and an investment as an element in virtuous conduct. This is the rationality underlying the emphasis on lifelong learning strategies: lifelong learning is claimed to be an element in 'investment in human resources' and in a movement towards a 'knowledge-based economy'. This economy is in turn defined as one of 'sustainable economic growth with

more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council 2000; Commission 2001: 9, 15).

This last phrase, which can be found throughout the official documents of the OMC, points to a further utopian element embodied in the OMC: the improvement of society towards cohesion and inclusion. Inclusion and cohesion are, however, in this context defined as being closely related to the labour market (Commission 2001: 6, 25, 47). The utopian vision is therefore of a particular notion of society as an economy of employed or self-employed individuals (cf. Threlfall 2002). Populations as an investment target and as human resources are the object through which government is to approach this moral end.

In general, the total body of structural indicators of the OMC, the checklist against which member state progress is continuously to be measured, may be seen as a compilation of answers. These answers point at one and the same time to a number of underlying problematizations (if these are the answers, to which problems are they an answer?; Rose 1999: 21; Dean 1999: 27) and characteristics of a good society: society as an economically wealthy society (indicators of GDP and GDP growth) specifically relying on the establishment of well-functioning markets to achieve this wealth (indicators of economic reform, cf. also Haahr and Walters 2003); society as an innovative and constantly evolving system of technologies and technological production (cf. also Barry 2001: 37–61); society as a space of a certain geographical homogeneity (indicators of the dispersion of regional unemployment rates) and of low risk, both in relation to population exposure to poverty and pollution and also in relation to the external environment and the protection of natural resources (indicators of risk of poverty, population exposure to pollution, greenhouse gas emission, waste collection and protection of natural resources).

The rationality of the OMC therefore represents an ambitious and far-reaching programme of government. Within this rationality, government is a strategic activity directed towards the creation of a situation in which the whole population is actively and continuously involved in the production of wealth, in which these activities take place within a framework of markets, where competitiveness *vis-à-vis* an external world is crucial, and in which investment, in populations as well as in research and technological innovations, forms a key element.

The OMC thus embodies a vision of society as a *machinery of performance*. It is an economic machine, in so far as an economic rationality and economic notions of efficiency, wealth and competitiveness occupy an important place. But it is also a biological machine, in so far as the active management of populations, of their education, their entry into and exit from labour markets, etc., occupies an equally important place. Finally, it is an advanced liberal machine, for it is a machine which seeks to work mainly through freedom, through establishing and securing mechanisms which can effectively unleash the energies of society.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OMC

In this article, I have analysed the nature of the OMC in the EU, as this particular constellation of rationalities and technologies appears from the perspective of a Foucauldian 'analytics of government'. I have argued that, from this viewpoint, the OMC is a particular expression of advanced liberal government, a governmentality which embodies specific notions of 'society', 'freedom' and 'the free subject'. In analysing the technologies, visibilities, rationalities and identities of the OMC, it thus appears that we can identify the same ambivalence as more general in advanced liberal mentalities of government. This is an ambivalence where government is at one and the same time an activity which enables and enforces agency, involvement, deliberation and the creation of partnerships through technologies of agency, and an activity which conditions this agency, its involvement and deliberation, and subjects it to certain standards of rationality through the application of a range of technologies of performance. Freedom in advanced liberal government is a conditioned and structured freedom. This applies for OMCs in the EU as it applies for government in contemporary European societies in general.

The presence of ambivalence should not, however, overshadow the other elements of the particular governmentality of the OMC. The OMC also contains and confirms a specific set of identities, as member states are constructed as participants in a process of self-conscious self-improvement, the progress of which is supervised by the moral agent of the Commission. The utopian goal of this process appears to be human society as some perfect 'machinery of performance', perfect in the sense of encompassing all of society's members in employment and in the sense of being economically wealthy, economically competitive and guarded against risks. The OMC also confirms a specific European identity, namely as some 'community of destiny': both the formulation of overall objectives for the Union and the systematic comparisons of performances in relation to a comprehensive range of indicators presuppose that the method of co-ordination is there to contribute to the realization of some common destiny. It implies a certain self-evidence and naturalness in co-operation between the EU member states in a wide range of fields, even where a good case could be made for co-operation in alternative settings.

This analysis contains a specific contribution to the ongoing debate about the importance of the OMC. As this question is most often formulated, it pertains to the behavioural changes likely or unlikely to occur as a result of the introduction of a set of common objectives, mechanisms of peer review, etc. Is the OMC 'much ado about nothing' or will the approach of free but structured co-ordination have far-reaching effects on member state policies and the overall development of the EU?

An analytics of government does not provide answers to these specific questions: the question of behavioural change would imply the analysis in a positivist regime of truth which is at odds with the starting points of a Foucauldian analytics. Evidently, this does not mean that a focus on behavioural

change is of no value. But from the viewpoint of an analytics of government, the question to ask about the OMC is not primarily its measurable effects but its broader *significance.*

As suggested by the analysis above, an important element in the significance of the OMC is the enabling or constraining implications of the rationalities and the technologies which it embodies, for instance as these implications point towards *empowerment* or *constrainment*, whether and how technologies of performance supplement or contradict technologies of agency.

This analysis of significance, in turn, enables two moves: a deconstructive one and a constructive one. As for the deconstructive move, the analysis above highlights the OMC as a European expression of a broader current of thinking, according to which government is government at a distance and through the manipulation of techniques and mechanisms, a mentality in which freedom is a structured and supervised freedom, and a mentality which relies upon a knowledge of populations as an investment object and an economic resource. This move seeks to destabilize the 'taken-for-grantedness' of the particular mechanisms of the OMC and the identities it establishes, just as it brings to the fore and opens up possibilities for criticism of the fine-masked mechanisms of power involved in this allegedly 'soft' form of governance.

As for the constructive move, an analytics of government makes possible a delimitation of the possible from the less possible. As is the case for discourse analysis more generally – and I understand Foucault's analytics of government to be a particular strand of engaged discourse analysis – the analysis of governmentalities in the EU may thus point to the existence of hegemonic conceptions, elements which have acquired the status of knowledge, for which reason they are located largely outside the realm of the contestable. Even if they are contestable and contingent in principle, such durable structures constitute limits to what may count as meaningful and convincing arguments and actions, and therefore also separate more likely from less likely constellations (cf. Wæver 1998: 116–18).

I have argued that the governmentality of the EU in connection with the OMC reflects advanced liberal mentalities of government which seem to predominate in surrounding contexts. A number of notions are reified in this mentality, meaning that they are in effect placed largely outside the realm of the contestable. This is the case, for instance, with the notion of government at a distance through the manipulation of techniques and mechanisms, and of society as a pool of resources.

If we view these reifications as part of a hegemonic conception in contemporary society, they imply certain limits on possible future forms of government in the EU. Direct EU intervention in societal processes are, for instance, unlikely to be a predominant element. Technologies which are seen to contain a potential for releasing societies' resources and as allowing a 'freedom of choice' are more likely to find a significant place in future attempts to 'govern in the name of Europe'.

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NOTES

1 An extended version of this article will appear in William Walters and Jens Henrik Haahr, *Governing Europe. Discourse, Governmentality and European Integration*, London: Routledge, 2004. This book subjects a number of fields of European integration to analysis along the lines of a Foucauldian analytics of government.
2 The concept of 'network governance' has also, however, been applied in analyses of policy-making in the EU (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999).
3 The concept of panopticism stems from Foucault's analysis of the historical development of prison institutions, where the surveillance mechanisms of the emerging modernity find an architectonical expression in Jeremy Bentham's ideas on prison reform and his proposal for a transparent Panopticon.

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