

Qualification as title, symbol, emblem or code: A currency of human *qualities*?

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Abstract

Qualifications as documents that represent human qualities have become the currency for bartering in such qualities. If these documents were to be based on more reliable empirical correspondence related to the genetic profile and measured competence of a person, would it not be possible to create a human resource or qualification exchange with its own DOW Jones, Nikkei or JSE? This essay uses Ricoeur's notion of '... Utopia as a major resource against closure' to reflect critically on this Orwellian notion.

Although a qualification as a title, symbol, emblem or code is generally accepted as a representation of a person's knowledge, skills and or competence as it relates to the labour market, it should also be seen as crucial in determining one's allocation to positions of social status and power. The free market discourse, which according to Bourdieu, can be

seen as an infernal machine whose necessity imposes itself even upon the rulers, sanctify the power of markets in the name of economic efficiency. After arguing the powerful reality of the discourse of the free market in shaping our understanding and the role of qualifications in a global economy, the Orwellian notion of a human resource exchange is explored.

The concluding paragraph constitutes a plea for codifying our scepticism about the consequences of the quest for maximising individual profit. There is a limit to the flexibility of human beings' ability to adapt and continuously mutate according to the performativity demands of the free market. Universities should not be seduced into merely equipping people with competitive competence. It is also imperative to interrogate social discourses that corrode an interrelated global democratic future.

Introduction

A qualification is a document which represents human 'qualities' and as such serves as a barterable commodity. Individuals who have invested in an 'education', as described by an earlier generation, or in attaining a degree which may be utilized to ensure an income or generate money, serve to underpin this view of a qualification. Would it not be beneficial for the bartering of human 'qualities' if the credibility of existing qualifications could be codified with more certainty? If a 'document' (emblem or symbol) could be created which is based on empirical correspondence, it could with much more certainty function as a barterable commodity in the free market. One could, for argument's sake, go one step further and wonder whether it would not be an idea to develop a type of *human resource exchange* or 'qualification bourse' for this bartering – with its own Dow Jones, Nikkei or JSE indicator-profile to determine prices and to empower qualification agents. What information would then serve as the basis for the analysis of transactions and the discounting of risk? Would it then become possible for 'educationalists' (*human resource managers*) to enrich themselves like other 'agents' by means of symbolic manipulation in a high-risk market?

Although the argument may seem farfetched, it is something that lends itself to reflection from an utopian or Orwellian perspective. In Education, which in the final analysis deals with the future, it is essential not only to understand in a utilitarian and functional manner the consequences of the future shock (Toffler, 1970) and the third wave of the information era (Toffler, 1980), the fifth discipline (Senge, 1994), the interactive technology and digital revolution of the virtual world, but also to translate it into meaningful education assignments. Ricoeur (as quoted by Baumann, 1998, 98) infers that "... in our era blocked by seemingly invisible systems it is the utopia which becomes our major resource as the weapon against closure". It has become necessary to earnestly react in as many ways as possible to Sloterdijk's (2000, 32) call, at the demise of our domestication ability, to reflect critically on the meaning of *literacy* or the qualities which would assure a humane future.

In this essay we wish to hypothetically consider the potential consequences for society should the notions of the free market be allowed unchallenged to shape an economic

(political) theory as the scientific representation of reality; or to paraphrase, determine valuable human qualities in terms of qualifications as currency. *Qualification* refers to the document that represents the qualities (characteristics, expertise, proficiencies, competencies, etc.) which a person supposedly possesses, normally as a result of a formal learning process and a *prüfung* or assessment to justify the attestation. This implies that it is a title, symbol or emblem to which meaning is attached within a historical-social context other than the so-called empirically verifiable dimension.

What would the consequences be for people and society should qualifications and the genetic code become *the* codifying mechanism of human qualities? Would a human qualities 'stock exchange' not be a logical consequence for determining human value? This extreme representation of the role of qualifications as the formal recognition of the "... capacity to perform important and responsible social roles and to exercise the associated social status and power" (Eggleston, 1984, 17) could contribute to the creation of the so-called *open space* in which alternative meanings and decisions become visible. Arguing from the space between our usual understanding and an Orwellian or utopian (or maybe dystopian) position is done " ... in the hope of opening up connections and questions that are hard to see from within the space that marks its usual territories ..." (MacLure and Stronach, 1997, 4).

After a brief argument on the possibility of the dominant free market logic of reality shaping the future, a few indications of the origin and conditions for a *human resource exchange* are set out. In the final paragraph, a plea is made for the continued interrogation of social discourses that corrode an interrelated democratic future and to assure that qualifications also codify the right to *doubt*.

The powerful *reality* of the logic of the market

In this context we want to accept the reasoning of Bourdieu (1998) that new liberalism is a theory which is able to separate itself from its social and historical roots and thereby possess the means to make it true as well as empirically verifiable. According to him it is not simply another discourse amongst others, but more powerful. It succeeds in shaping the choices of those who dominate economic relations and thereby adding their own symbolic power to the relational power fields.

The inhumanity of trading in people has been regarded as repugnant since the abolishment of slavery. Yet a *human resource exchange* as mentioned above would probably result in something similar without much opposition. Opposition would disappear if the rationale, which constitutes it, is morally above suspicion and if it could be divorced from the stigma attached to human trade. It would come across much more acceptably if it could be regarded as an exchange where contracts come about voluntarily between people with regard to that which is 'objective', measurable and deliverable and with the consent of both buyers and sellers. That would devoid the exchange of the obvious unacceptability of an enforced slave market and approach the safe notion of a labour market. For centuries people

have exchanged their labour. The acceptability must therefore rest on a reality in which people are *disciplined* (compare the meaning attached to this concept by Foucault (1979)) to such an extent that they accept responsibility on their own initiative as independent agents for their market choices. A further prerequisite can be sought in the restriction of trade to a specific objective demonstrable function of humanness that is required as a resource within a production process or context.

In views where the centrality of the subject as the privileged philosophical and political being is questioned, the notion of man¹ as autonomous and responsible for the validity of his own beliefs, values and decisions as the result of rational choices is questioned. Rather, persons are viewed as networks of relationships (Wielemans, 1993) *codified* in the meanings of their historical and social interwovenness. From this perspective it is accepted that there are certain influences which have a dominating effect in the shaping of the *networks of relationships* or on the *codifying of meaning*. These influences are not only visible and formal, but often contribute subconsciously to the development of a person and her/his self-image. From the notion of *governmentality* as developed by Foucault (*cf.* the exposition of Rose, 1996) the dual dimensions of these powerful interactions can be argued. According to Foucault's interpretation of governmentality, power is not a substance nor can it be seen to be vested only in the one-way, linear power of the state apparatus, but that it also originates in the many (complex) social relationships in which people constitute themselves mutually and individually. Power or governance does not exist of itself, but originates where it is put into action. This is reflected in the dual meaning ascribed by Foucault to the notion "... subject to someone else by control and dependence, and ties to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (West, 1997, 170). On the one hand, power takes shape within Foucault's disciplining logic as subjugating conditions of the self (e.g. self-mastering and self-regulating) to which free and 'civilised' citizens subject themselves, and which are enabled by what Sloterdijk (2000, 150-154) would call anthropotechniques. On the other hand, it also takes shape through bio-political strategies that are centred in standardising practices external to the individual such as:

... statistical enquiries, censuses, programmes for enhancement or curtailment of rates of production or the minimization of illness and the promotion of health – that seek to render intelligible the domains whose laws liberal government must know and respect (Rose, 1998, 44).

According to this view, the person as a network of relationships gives meaning or is codified by the manner in which power is exercised in the various relationships in which he/she is involved. This undermines the idea of the autonomous individual as our thoughts are also formed by the hidden, subconscious determinants of thinking (Merquior, 1985, 15). The way in which reality is conceptualised and what is governed is co-constituted by the powerful effect of the most dominant discourse. The use of overt power becomes irrelevant when people subconsciously – sometimes only partially and sometimes in resistance – internalise values and convictions which do not in reality represent their own interests.

¹ Man is here chosen deliberately against the background of feminist critique and the historical rootedness of the epistemes of science (*cf.* Gore, 1993) that often equated man and rationality.

The powerful driving force of the free market discourse is not only to be found in the constituting of the individual, but also in the bio-political instruments of the state. Bourdieu (1998, 3) depicts the discourse of the free market as a type of "... infernal machine, whose necessity imposes itself even upon the rulers". He argues that the free market principle is gradually accepted, not only by those who can benefit a great deal from it like financiers, owners and leaders of large corporations, but also by political leaders and bureaucrats who act as a result thereof:

... they sanctify the power of markets in the name of economic efficiency, which requires the elimination of administrative or political barriers capable of inconveniencing the owners of capital in their individual quest for the maximisation of individual profit, which has been turned into a model of rationality.

The current debate regarding qualifications is increasingly being shaped by the discourse on the free market. Contrary to the notion of the individual as a network of relatedness, new liberalism promotes the idea of possessive individualism. This is succinctly described by Popkewitz from a critical perspective (as quoted in Holland, 1998, 9) as the idea that:

... society is composed of free, equal individuals who are related to each other as proprietors of their own capabilities. Their successes and acquisitions are the products of their own initiatives, and it is the role of institutions to foster and support their personal development – not least because national revitalization – economic, cultural, and civic – will result from the good works of individual.

In the debate on competency based training (CBT) the needs or demands of the economy are becoming decisive. It is even alleged that it is used by governments, who themselves are subject to the captains of *industry*, to manipulate the training debate.² Against the background of what Ulrich Beck described as the *risk society*, Klarus (2000, 36) reasons that the balance between the interests of players, structures and systems is largely determined by the extent to which the risks for the various partners can be minimised. From an economic perspective the inefficiencies of the market are ascribed to the lack of a "... common currency for occupational standards and qualifications" (Burgoyne as quoted in Holland, 1998, 67). Would objective qualifications in which valid, dependable and especially comparable competencies are exemplified as clearly as possible, not be able to serve this need? Mention has already been made of *credits* and a *learning bank with individual learning accounts* (Commission on Social Justice, 1996, 199-202).

When the prescriptions of the current discourse are examined, the flexibility of businesses,

² Compare in this regard the shift in meaning behind the creation of a national qualification framework in South Africa. It initially originated from the needs of transformation to a participative democracy, but so-called outcomes based standards and qualifications are gradually being dominated by the discourse on competency based training, measurability and economic competitiveness.

which are continuously confronted by new risks, comes to the fore. In the post-industrial information and interactive technological era, organisations are confronted with the challenges of *fast paced global competition* (Howard, 1995, 24). In such a context competencies and knowledge continually become obsolete and are replaced. It would therefore follow that it would be much more effective to contract relevant competencies and skills as needed. Selection to ensure a risk-minimalising fit between the changing demands of the organisation and available competencies are becoming increasingly important. The *down-sizing* of businesses and the accompanying dehierarchising of layered organisations is characteristic of a context in which not even the core workers can be certain of long-term careers in the same organisation (Howard, 1995, 37).

Against the background of this discourse we therefore want to argue that qualifications (analogous to the development of paper money and even plastic money) are taking shape as the negotiable currency of human qualities. Developments such as the national qualification frameworks (e.g. Australia, Britain, South Africa) for vocational education and discussions to enhance the comparability of university qualifications (*cf.* Wielemans, 2000-2001 on the Bologna Accord) as well as the prominence of the accreditation discourse attest thereof. In the economic sector the increase in agents (mediators in the labour market) for staff recruitment or employment agencies and *headhunters* for top corporate posts are already an indication of the existence of such a need.

In the mediation process a curriculum vitae forms the most important document on the strength of which the suitability of the qualities of a candidate within a certain occupational context are evaluated. It is, however, based on a personal narrative (or life story) where the status of the educational institution(s) that awarded the qualifications could be decisive. However, in changing, complex and especially flexible societies that need to discount future risks, such a document is of relative value. Verifying the validity and reliability of human 'qualities' (competency with regard to certain domains of knowledge and within specific contexts) is expensive and time-consuming when in-depth investigations have to be undertaken to ensure the perfect fit. The increase in psychometric tests (post-natal selection mechanisms) in the selection of human qualities for a specific workplace is indicative of the need to eliminate risk when contracting human 'qualities'. In this regard Preston (1999, 567) refers to the prerequisite competencies that are already required for low as well as high status occupations which require credit accumulation and transfer points in order to ensure membership of their professional bodies. Furthermore, the number of organizations and control processes that are assuming responsibility for the accreditation of educational institutions are increasing steadily. Assuring the quality of programmes that lead to qualifications is increasingly institutionalised in societies.

In the context of a so-called *hyper-cyber global labour market* transferable skills and a continuous "... process of optimizing potential and performativity" (*cf.* Webster, 2000, 312-326; Coffield, 1999) become virtually self-evident. Engaging in a long-term agreement with one particular person whose 'qualities' can become obsolete or irrelevant, is posed as costly risks for competitive organisations. The obsolescence or irrelevance of qualifications is being attributed to the shortcomings and lack of adaptability of the individual, but especially older persons who do not possess relevant qualifications due to the continuous

changing demands of the market. Qualifications do not sufficiently reflect the atomised and transferable competencies which people possess. The portability, transferability and articulation of human qualities could be executed with much less risk if a dependable currency existed whereby the process could be mediated and contracts legitimised. In fact, Dalichow (as quoted by Preston, 1999, 567) already describes

(T)he ability to link these systems (NVQ & CAT) with each other, with the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) and so with other national systems, including the North American RAMP systems envisages an increasingly sophisticated global system for the classification of flexible and mobile labour at all skill levels.

"Human resource exchange" – dystopia of the future?

The junction between education and the consumer society, where education is idealised as lifelong, is viewed as *the* problem. For Klarus (2000, 35), from the perspective of adult education and in his call for a viable alternative for the exclusive and preclusive school-bound examinations, the problem manifests in the lack of synchronisation between the labour system and the education system. This synchronization is problematised in terms of the shortcomings of education with regard to the dynamically changing employment system in the context of globalisation. The education side emphasises the broad applicability and durability of acquired knowledge and skills, whereas the demand side values immediate practical application and optimal use in specific work situations and flexibility and adaptability to changes in the organisational context and production techniques.

To promote the flexibility of the qualification structure as this synchronisation between the labour and education systems, the development of a *human resource exchange* seems to have become inevitable.

The possibility of the development of a '*human resource exchange*' does not rest solely on the futuristic notion of downloading your memory onto a computer file, but rather on other assumptions. The first is the expectation that qualifications should give more valid and reliable (less symbolic) expression to human 'qualities' which should be serviceable to specific labour, production or service rendering contexts. Yet another assumption is that the information can be stored and continuously upgraded to efficiently reconcile the differences between the demand for and supply of barterable human qualities.

Two developments of the past two decades seem especially to point towards increasing certainty in this regard. On the one hand there is the promise of the gene technology which has already been developed to such an extent that these tests form the basis for identifying a specific person (it is more exact than fingerprints and is indicative of the potential qualities of a particular individual). Every person could therefore technically be included in a population register in terms of the gene profile. Everybody might even be implanted with a scanable barcode. On the other hand there is the increasing propagation, especially from the

occupational training sector (in-service and retraining), of the idea of valid, dependable, fair and authentic evaluation of (learning) achievement in terms of criteria or expected outcomes. Qualifications which have bearing only on a specific field, discipline or traditional subject area and which include norm-based evaluation, are questioned on the grounds of the uncertainty of such learning to be successfully utilized within the context of an occupation. Greater flexibility would be possible for individuals and organizations if competencies (measured more exactly) could be demanded and supplied freely. A qualification profile (on the grounds of e.g. unit standards) could be synchronised more accurately with the competencies that the organisation requires.

If the gene code could be combined with criterion based empirically tested achievements of a person's competence and performance, the 'codifying' of qualifications could be far more certain. That which cannot be measured within the context of the particular occupational domain by means of postnatal selection mechanisms, could be combined with particular groupings of genes (pre-natal selection mechanisms) which would put the synchronization of the 'delivery of education' and the 'labour marker' on a far more sure footing. It would enable the codifying of 'qualities' in terms of the needs of the labour market and the establishment of a human resource exchange. That in the not too distant future questions will be raised about the 'procreation for the human zoo' (Sloterdijk, 2000, 150 - 154) is not the focus of the present argument.

As far as the gene code is concerned, it appears that the deciphering of human genes should make it possible to irrefutably determine a profile of congenital qualities. The genetic profile would be more valid and dependable than the results of a plethora of psychological instruments and processes which have been designed to measure those hard to determine dimensions of the human psyche (e.g. introvert/extrovert, strategic/communicative, leadership, etc.). Should this be combined with measured workplace relevant achievements (expressed as competence or performance), wouldn't it be possible to decide on the suitability of competencies or human resources with far less risk than currently occurs on the grounds of an historic account (curriculum vitae as narrative) and personal meeting? The design and refining of measuring instruments would therefore focus increasingly on the effectiveness of competence in the production and exchange context with the concomitant possibility of issuing qualifications which would represent a verified code rather than be a mere symbol of potential. Traditional education should also increasingly be able to focus on simulation of the workplace and the promotion and measuring of work relevant skills such as problem solving, self management, system thought, access selection and the reorganising of knowledge to take decisions, etc.

On the other hand, the development of the occupational structure is becoming increasingly specialised and fragmented in order to express particular competencies which are required for specific projects. According to Waterman, Waterman and Collard (1996, 209) the concept of occupation has already changed:

In the old days, it pretty much meant sticking with one company and rising in one speciality area. These days, both companies and employees are healthier if employees have multiple skills, if they can move easily across functional

boundaries, if they are comfortable switching back and forth between regular duties and special projects, and if they feel comfortable moving on when the right fit within one company can no longer be found.

The reorganisation and classification of work (especially in the service sector) in terms of required competencies to complete tasks which range from cleaning, filing (electronic or otherwise), programme design, production control to and including electronic and strategic design, make it possible to devise baskets of competencies which enable projects to be completed. According to Preston (1999, 567) "... the description of competency (is) now possible in terms of nationally and internationally interlinked systems for the accreditation of experiential and lifelong learning and continuing professional development". She goes even further by stating that it is "... becoming mandatory in applications for employment and promotion from the least to the most skilled sectors of the labour force". Instead of the traditional hierarchy in which persons with career prospects are employed on a permanent basis, it may become possible to contract competency entrepreneurs. The growth in the number of consultants who sell their knowledge and skills to organizations is an indication of this tendency. Furthermore, the increasing number of workers who perform contract 'jobs' rather than being full-time employees is a further indication (more than 40% of the workers in the EU are already contract workers). The upgrading of competencies (lifelong learning) would then become regarded as the responsibility of the *competency entrepreneur* rather than the employing organisation. As such it can be seen as a criterion example of what Bourdieu (1998, 2) regards as the competition that is extended to:

... individuals themselves, through individualisation of the wage relationship; establishment of individual performance objectives, individual performance evaluations, permanent evaluation, individual salary increases or granting of bonuses as a function of competence and of individual merit; individualised career paths; strategies of 'delegating responsibility' tending to ensure the self-exploitation of staff who, simple wage labourers in relations of strong hierarchical dependence, are at the same time held responsible for their sales, their products, their branch, their store, etc. as though they were independent contractors.

The training and retraining, equipping and re-equipping, with ever evolving new competencies of human resources are fast becoming one of the biggest growth sectors of the economy.

The credibility of the accreditation body for the assessment of work related performance would represent one of the key positions in the development of a human resource exchange. The growth in accreditation requirements and total quality assurance in the education sector is a development pointing in this direction. It is, however, still heavily coupled to the assurance of the quality of the learning programme and the historical notion of what gets learnt less visibly through the hidden curriculum. Assessment, which will have to become increasingly more exact, is already a field in which, especially in terms of so-called criterion referenced measurements, claim is laid to such exactness. With regard to the existing uncertainties pertaining to the measurement of competencies and achievements,

there is scope for organisations to establish their distinctiveness in the market through a distinguished emblem of quality or corporate logo. All organisations which optimise or produce human qualities could publish annual reports on the competitive success of their qualifications to inform the human resource exchange. Educational institutions with recognized emblems (those which enjoy top positions on the so-called league tables) will most probably increasingly refine the selection of potential candidates in order to ensure their *currency's* achievements. To reduce the risk of currency fluctuation of the institutions' qualifications, the genetic code would most probably become a prominent mechanism to determine access.

With a human resource exchange (virtual on the internet served by scanable implanted barcodes) it would be possible for both entrepreneurs who offer competencies and production and service organisations who require them, to reconcile the supply and demand via 'qualifications' as currency (specified in terms of the qualities supplied and demanded). The scope of the trade in specific types of competencies and the price could eventually result in an index according to which prices are contracted depending on the normal market related developments, but especially scarcity. Lyotard (as contained in Hinkson, 1991, 48) suggested in 1984 (possibly not coincidentally) that the following perspective is not farfetched:

... to visualize learning circulating along the same lines as money, instead of for its "educational" value or political (administrative, diplomatic, military) importance; the pertinent distinction would no longer be between knowledge and ignorance, but rather, as is the case with money, between "payment knowledge" and "investment knowledge" – in other words, between units of knowledge exchanged in a daily maintenance framework (the reconstruction of the workforce, "survival") versus funds of knowledge dedicated to optimising the performance of a project.

More complex and more sought after competencies would indeed be able to bargain for much higher prices. Especially competencies such as those required in an era of super complexity characterised by what Barnett (2000, 415) described as " ... contestability, challengeability, uncertainty and unpredictability ... surrounded by others such as change, turmoil, turbulence, risk and even chaos" could be lucratively marketed.

To the extent that in practice certain aspects of the idea of human resource exchange probably already exist, the question should be about the consequences in the event of the underlying dynamics of the free market discourse becoming increasingly more effective in shaping the inevitability of such a 'reality'. On the one hand, it appears as if the movements in the labour market are so dynamic that it would not be realistic to regulate it centrally and to standardize and mutually link qualifications. Regulation by the unseen hand of the market would seem to be the most obvious alternative. Not only would it enable the education sector to become established as a service industry amidst the lucrative consumer companies, but also enhance the serviceability thereof to the economy. In addition, it may be argued that it can only benefit humanity in their enterprising and exchanging interaction with reality. The decline of socialism and its promised equal care of all individuals also

begs to be enterprisingly in the world.

On the other hand, the dystopia painted in the preceding argument hopefully contributes to creating an open space in which the more serious consequences of *the infernal machine of the free-market logic* should become visible. Competency entrepreneurs are in the final analysis only employees who increasingly find themselves in circumstances where, according to Preston (1999, 569), conditions of service are slowly but surely being eroded; where people find themselves:

... on a treadmill as they try to develop strategies to meet domestic financial commitments. Without time or money to invest in training or other personal development, deskilling ensues as they rehash old knowledge and skill to meet the minimal terms of reference of new work. In time there comes the mechanistic repetition of tasks, not on the endless manufacturing conveyor belt of the past, but in equally controlled working contexts, where they work for diverse employers at their places of work, or on-line.

Should the consequences of an ethic which allows itself to be regulated only by supply and demand, productivity and effectiveness in the service of increased consumerism, be allowed to become reality?

A plea for qualifications to also codify 'doubt'

The powerful steering effect of the market discourse and concomitant demand for lifelong learning as the strategic charge to education undermines all existing educational debates. Integrated and socially just nationhood and participative democracy are contributions of education that will have to yield to the *infernal machine*. In the preceding argument, qualifications as 'currency' were stripped from the person and exemplified as the epitome of reality. In such a context it is becoming increasingly difficult to focus on the role of education other than in terms of the current debate regarding the market needs and international competitiveness. The prominence of notions such as excellence, quality, cost effectiveness and especially global competitiveness eliminate all criticism. The fact that these concepts could also be serviceable to less desirable projects such as transgressions against human rights and the rape of nature, disappears in a social rhetoric where the so-called neutral and utility driven concepts are raised to be the only values of our time. Or as Bourdieu (1998, 3) puts it:

... the Marxism of an earlier time, with which, in this regard, it has much in common, this utopia evokes a powerful belief – the **free trade faith** – not only among those who live off it, such as financiers, the owners and managers of large corporations, etc., but also among those who derive their justification for existing from it. For they sanctify the power of markets in the name of economic efficiency ... in their individual quest for maximisation of individual profit, which has been turned into a model of rationality.

What eventually becomes of the person in whom the 'qualities' are embedded and the educational institutions that have a duty to mould people *are never questioned*? The profile of the person who is being prepared for short-lived work experiences in flexible industries, which are continually confronted by new risks, is increasingly shaping educational discourse.

Although the 'market' regards all owners and competencies as free and equal, it only serves to obscure the degree to which real differences exist between participants to calculate their own interest and by implication their autonomy and possibility of choice. "Under the guise of neutrality, the institution of the market actively confirms and reinforces the pre-existing social order of wealth, privilege and prejudice" (Ranson as cited by Tet, 1996, 160).

To Sennet (1998) it appears as if the psyche of youth can count on more success when it is upgradeable and reprogrammable like the open windows of a computer reflecting collections of addressable useful fragments. People who are seeking for coherence, hinder the lucrative willingness and flexibility of a labour market engaging in temporary, transitory tasks where people are expected to utilise their 'qualities' in teams to achieve a clearly defined task and to easily move forward to the next group and task. The dominant rule of the game determines that rejuvenation comes through taking risks, by destroying exhausted knowledge and by continually being reprogrammed or to mutate in the context. Flexibility presupposes that every shared task involves new risks, new knowledge and science, new relationships and continuous changing (also ethical) rules. The practice of flexibility in industry increasingly presupposes that quick changes in competencies become the norm.

It does, however, appear as if the new mobility and freedom's promise are misleading. It is rather becoming a new order of domination. The attractive new flexi-time forms part of a subtle contemporary power struggle which has changed governance into a new guise by means of soft psychological and strategic steering (by analytical and chemical means). A guise of self-chosen governance but which is in fact dependent on the commissioners. In consequence, people migrate easily and extinguish short-lived friendships at the speed of electrical shocks in casual and temporary workplaces. In this manner a Darwinian world develops what Bourdieu (1998, 3) describes as "... arrangements that produce insecurity and the existence of a reserve army of employees rendered docile by these social processes that make their situations precarious ...". The function of competent and contractually bound individuals contributes to atomising people and leads to the dismantling of collective action potential and social responsibility (*ibid.*, 1998, 2). It unwittingly deprives people of the characteristics which link them to each other and which guarantee that they can develop a wholesome identity.

Within such a 'reality' we would plead anew for contesting the idea of competence and genetically codified qualifications. It has become necessary to renegotiate for human standards in the workplace. Qualifications that result in 'titles' represent, in addition to competence, certain ethical codes that regulate those who exercise the profession. Has such codifying of human resource managers not become necessary? Can such an important task in a highly competitive and consumerist world be left merely to 'trust'? Has it not become

necessary to fundamentally reflect on the fact that all human beings are inseparably the bearers of their competencies, knowledge or skills? It is imperative that everyone should be educated to enable their reflection and participations in the human resource exchange without becoming willing slaves of the dominant discourse.

In reality qualifications represent competencies which increasingly refer to only a small section of human existence. Should an education which is concerned only with marketable competencies be acceptable to an individual who works for eight hours a day for five days, not even every week and not for a whole life? We would argue that it is unjustifiable and that people should also be moulded to think and make time for reflection in addition to becoming enterprisingly occupied, driven by the inherent need to achieve success and to live in alliance with others. The possibility to contemplate and choose to accept responsibility for the consequences of being enterprisingly occupied is what distinguishes humans from all other creatures. Or as Jansen (2000, 64) puts it, people should also be enabled to meaningfully integrate the often contradictory knowledge and experience that is generated in the diverse contexts of workplaces and different lifestyles. Has it not become crucially important for education in all spheres to re-emphasise historically developed concepts such as critical thought, reflective involvement, contemplation, conscientization (Freire), engagement and solidarity? We would include ideas which have their origin in the core of the human contemplative process from which we inherited in what Sloterdijk (2000) describes as the *letters from our past*, the outcomes of the labour of *great thinkers*. Did not these very thinkers help to shape our understanding of governance and governmentality, of overt power but also the more covert impact of powerful discourses?

Universities have been virtually swallowed by the spirit of delivering and marketing human resources. Those who have not been engulfed by massification and the development of customised market orientated qualifications are aiming at distinguished qualifications based on the idea of a propositional base and discipline of a particular domain (*cf.* Barnett, 2000). On the one hand, the emblematic or distinctive features of the qualification are given prominence while on the other hand the relevance of the domain is emphasised. Arguments relating to the multiplexity of knowledge and the acquisition and creation of new conceptual frameworks and technologies and the symbolic manipulation of reality shape marketing strategies. In other cases innovative approaches are promoted and new fields proclaimed as professions with programmes developed and adapted to the needs of the market. In both cases the choice of students who take calculated risks to attain such qualifications is driven by the promise of returns on their investments and its concomitant consumer connoisseurship. Little room remains to contemplate the implications of our mutual existence on earth – neither in the programmes nor in the discovery and production of ever more knowledge and newer and more refined technology. In the context of the global free market discourse Malherbe and Berkhout (2000) argued that the threat to the critically reflective role of the universities is not located in the traditional notion of governance and state power, but much rather in the total irrelevance of ideas like 'academic freedom'.

In an era where, according to Barnett (2000, 420), university knowledge is "... understood

as offering a pure, objective reading of the world, have to be abandoned", literacy should be re-examined. Super complexity calls for an epistemology of uncertainty which, for him (*ibid.*, 420), should result in " ... the capacity for revolutionary reframing; for critical interrogation of all claimants for knowledge and understanding; enabling individuals to feel at ease in an uncertain world and developing powers of critical action" – for qualifications that also codify the right to doubt.

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