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Fearful asymmetry: circuits of paranoia in governing through school inspection

John Clarke

In this chapter, I explore the perverse dynamics of one field of governing relationships in England: the system of school inspection provided by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education). I suggest that this process – and the field of relationships through which it is conducted - are characterised by an emotional intensity at odds with conventional descriptions of rational bureaucratic organization or claims about the forensic or scientific objectivity of audit and inspection processes (see Power, 1999 and Lindgren and Clarke, 2014, on the significance of ‘forensic’ imagery for school inspection). Yet this form of emotional intensity – what I describe as a circuit of paranoia – is also different from the forms and sites of emotion that have been of growing academic interest. The hard nosed evaluative process of inspection differs in theory and practice from the ‘therapeutic state discerned by Nolan and others (Nolan, 1998). Nor is it a site of ‘emotional labour’ in which the organization and management of the social is conducted through care or relationship work (after Hochschild, 1983). Rather, I suggest that the form of collective psychopathology visible in the school inspection regime is an unintended (though perhaps not unexpected) effect of a model of governing that seeks to promote continuous improvement which is constructed out of mistrust and surveillance and is conducted through organizational relationships that emphasise governmental, social and professional distance between the inspectors and the inspected. It is perhaps closer to Isin’s understanding of the ‘neurotic citizen’ (2004) as a perverse consequence of neoliberal rule – the anxious subject that forms in the shadow of the incitement to be responsible, independent, and empowered.

The first section of the chapter traces the creation and development of Ofsted as a system of school governing. This and the following section detail some of

the ways in which the practice of school inspection in its Ofsted form has been both contentious and controversial. The following three sections explore some of the emotional dynamics associated with Ofsted as a mode of governing schooling, tracing formations of anxiety, suspicion and paranoia. I suggest that the dynamics of school inspection in England have been characterized by a form of collective psychopathology – a circuit of paranoia that operates in the whole field of relationships between individuals and organizations engaged by this process. In the conclusion, I consider what this attention to emotional dynamics – and the circuit of paranoia, in particular – adds to our understanding of governing practices and relationships.

The chapter draws on a (2010-2013) comparative study of systems of school inspection in England, Scotland and Sweden led by Jenny Ozga (see the project website: <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/governing-by-inspection>). The comparison was intended to explore different modes of governing schooling in the three different national systems and to contribute to a wider analysis of the role inspection plays in the governing of public services (Grek and Lindgren, 2014; see also a special issue of the journal *Sisyphus*, volume 2, issue 1: <http://revistas.rcaap.pt/sisyphus/issue/view/300>). During the study it became clear that the regime centred on Ofsted was distinctive in several ways: it had been created during a particular period of state reform (the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s); it had been shaped by a zealous approach to the process of public service improvement and it was marked by a history of contention between organizations and actors within the system of governing schooling. But even allowing for this history of contention (discussed further in the following section), there seemed to be a surplus – an excess – of emotional material surrounding this regime, that made its presence felt in case study interviews and more public forms (mass media). Such emotional excess was not visible or audible in the other two case studies: Sweden and Scotland seemed (emotionally) cooler and warmer respectively. As anthropologists have previously suggested, emotions might well have specific conditions of time, place and cultural form (e.g., Lutz, 1988; Lutz and White, 1986). However, this is not the place for a comparative study of emotional atmospheres: instead, this chapter focuses on the puzzle that the

English regime represents – how to understand the surplus of emotion that seemed to swirl around this mode of governing schooling.

Contentious governing?

In 1992, Ofsted replaced the long established Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (founded in 1839) as part of a larger reform of the architecture of governing in the UK undertaken by the Conservative governments of 1979 – 1997. Ofsted was both a modernised and modernising agency: it embodied a new approach to governing public services at a distance; and it was expected to ensure that the organizations, agents and processes that it governed became modern in their turn. The organization was created as part of the Conservative reforms of education that promoted greater 'autonomy' for schools (or at least, some schools), promised greater 'choice' for parents, nationalised the curriculum and aimed to overthrow approaches to teaching that were variously labelled as 'liberal', 'permissive' or 'child-centred'.

The new arrangements for governing schooling, like many other public services, were articulated around the principles of 'governing at a distance', rather than through the systems of integral government department bureaucracies (Clarke, 2014). The integral state was subjected to a programme of dispersal: multiplying the number and form of organisations involved in delivering services, and creating new organizations to direct, scrutinize and evaluate the performance of service providers (Newman and Clarke, 2009). In particular, forms of scrutiny, evaluation, audit and inspection took on increasingly important roles as means of managing dispersed or fragmented systems of provision (Power, 1999; Pollitt and Summa, 1999). Many of these organizations also adopted a view of their role as speaking for, and to, the 'consumers' of public services. In Ofsted's case, this identity was articulated in relation to the parents and pupils of schools, but also other groups of 'users' employers, communities, tax payers (see, for example, Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al, 2000; on Ofsted, see Clarke and Baxter, 2014).

Ofsted came into existence with the promise that every school (primary and secondary) in England would be inspected within four years, and would then receive repeated inspections. The centrality of inspection to the role and practice of Ofsted was embodied in its first corporate mission statement: 'Improvement through Inspection'. The scope of inspection also demanded a change in staffing, the core Inspectorate shrank from around 515 to 300 HMIs, with inspections to be staffed largely through sub-contracted inspectors. The inspection process was contractualised and put out for tender (another common 'marketising' reform of the Thatcher governments: on Ofsted, see Lawn, 2014). This system of subcontracting will be replaced by direct contracting of inspectors by Ofsted from September 2015.

Initially, the culture of the patrician-professional Inspectorate seemed to dominate the new organization and its relations to government. However, the appointment of Chris Woodhead as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) in 1994 (he served until 2000) is viewed as changing the style of the organization in a number of ways. Smith (2000), for example, describes him as leading a transformation of Ofsted into a 'campaigning organisation', which adopted explicit public stances on teaching methods, the quality of teachers, the curriculum, and school performance. He – and the organization – also propounded a zealous belief in the transformative power of inspection, despite limited or even contradictory evidence about its impacts (on zeal and public bureaucracies, see du Gay, 2000).

Ofsted represents a distinctive (if shifting) inspection regime; different in a number of respects from the two other national regimes we have been examining (Scotland and Sweden). It differs in its institutional location in the 'machinery of government', being an 'arm's length' agency of government, separate from the Department of Education. It differs in its organizational form: the extensive contracting out of the practice of inspection (currently to three corporate providers of inspectors). It differs in the framework that shapes and informs inspection and judgement (albeit with shifting frameworks). Finally, it differs in the degree of professional and governmental distance between inspectors and the inspected. This last point is particularly

significant, given that it appears to constitute school inspection in England as a peculiarly antagonistic relationship (for more on the three inspection regimes, see Grek and Lindgren, 2014).

Dogged by controversy.

Ofsted has been surrounded by controversy since its creation. The controversies have moved between different issues: methodological, organizational and political. The practice of inspection – especially on Ofsted’s almost industrial scale (described by Field et al. as ‘the bureaucratized, pressurised and subcontracted system of school inspection’, 1998: 126) – has been controversial in terms of its methodology. There are recurrent questions about the consistency of judgement between inspections and inspectors, despite the attempted standardization by handbook and training (see, for example, Penn (2002) or Sinkinson and Jones (2001) for specific examples). In our study, head teachers being interviewed recurrently posed the problem of a lack of ‘consistency’ in inspection practice and judgement (Baxter and Clarke, 2014). Field et al. observe that ‘The process is standardised and therefore presented as objective and fair’ (1998: 127). But, methodologically speaking, neither standardisation nor independence and impartiality guarantee reliable and comparable outcomes (Smith, 2000).

The Ofsted process of inspection has been viewed as producing perverse organizational effects. Inspection has been represented as time consuming, expensive and corrosive of trust and professional culture; and many studies have pointed to the dislocation and distraction associated with being inspected (e.g., Perryman, 2007). Several studies also point to the performative character of the inspection process, with recurrent (school staff) use of metaphors such as ‘jumping through hoops’ and ‘papering over the cracks’ (Plowright, 2007: 384); or Case et al.’s reporting of nominal compliance and the ‘performance’ of accountability and good teaching on a ‘stage managed’ basis (2000: 615-7). They conclude that everyone – including Ofsted – have a need to ‘show you’re working’ (see also Clarke,

2005 and Perryman, 2009, on the performative and panoptic qualities of inspection).

The proliferation of controversy, adversarial positions, antagonistic encounters and outbursts of hostility placed Ofsted in an unusually visible and problematised position in the world of governing. Often publicly named as a schools 'watch dog', it is also sometimes condemned as an 'attack dog' (attached to the Secretary of State on a short leash, but not named in the Dangerous Dogs Act). Alternatively, it has been viewed as a 'mad dog', capably of turning nasty; or – rather differently – as a 'lap dog', excessively comfortable in its proximity to the Secretary of State for Education (the dog metaphors are borrowed from Hackett, 2001). Inspection in the Ofsted mode appears to have been considerably more controversial and antagonistic than in our other examples. What is it about the English system that appears to put more 'distance' between inspectors and schools? In the following sections, I explore the collective psychodynamics of school inspection in the Ofsted mode, suggesting that the field of relationships of inspection might be described as a form of collective psychopathology: a circuit of paranoia.

Becoming anxious: the world of inspection

The Ofsted inspection process has frequently been discussed in terms of the levels of stress and anxiety that it can generate. For example, a representative of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) said the union had perceived increasing stress among teachers, resulting from the current model of inspection:

"The current model is about getting teachers to show how they've met their targets – if they haven't done so immediately there's a very quick procedure, not to support teachers, but towards disciplinary action and dismissal. That creates a context in which teachers feel under pressure." (quoted in Ratcliffe: 2012)

In some senses, this is not surprising, since part of the ethos of Ofsted is that pressure is needed to drive up standards. Indeed, the current Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has been scathing about schools (and teachers) who are 'coasting'. His concern about such schools drove one critical change in the inspection framework in 2013, which saw the replacement of the category of 'Satisfactory' with 'In need of Improvement'. In a series of comments, he challenged teachers and head teachers who complained about their jobs:

Sir Michael Wilshaw, the head of Ofsted, said that being a head teacher was a brilliant, well paid job and that school leaders had no grounds to complain... The comments risk further infuriating the teaching profession which has recently been told by Sir Michael that there is no stress in teaching and that staff who are out the school gates at 3.30pm should be paid less. "I have no time for head teachers who go around moaning," Sir Michael told heads, teachers and academics at the Institute of Education, in London. "They have to get on and do it." (Henry, 2012)

Commenting on such bracing interventions, the *New Stateswoman* (2012) argued that 'The reign of Sir Michael thus far has been peppered with controversy – this is a man who likes to make strong statements and to watch the reaction.' Ofsted has proved adept at maximising media coverage of its judgements and views, with the Chief Inspector always newsworthy. However, as we shall see, such mediatised presence for Ofsted and the Chief Inspector has proved to be a double edged sword. For the moment, though, these exchanges and anxieties fall within the realm of contentious governing relationships – and only the question of stress hints at the question of emotion. But, as Jane Perryman has argued in her study of the emotions of inspection, 'it is important when analyzing my own data to move beyond glib references to stress and look instead at the emotions within the statements' (2007: 182). She argues that, rather than the very visible issue of stress and overwork associated with Ofsted inspections, the critical theme 'appears to be fear. The teachers are not expressing their dislike at overwork, nor complaining about stress, but there seems to be a genuine fear.... Fear of the consequences of a poor Ofsted report drives people on in terms of massive

overwork, and it is the emotion of fear, not stress of overwork that is the important reaction' (2007:180).

Perryman traces a series of emotional responses among the teachers in the specific school she was studying and identifies a tendency toward 'disaffection' as the result of Ofsted inspections, condensing resentment, suspicion and a sense of being undermined as a professional (and as a person). This is an enormously suggestive study, but is confined to studying the recipients of inspection. In what follows I want to suggest that these emotional states are in play across the field of relationships, even if they are differentially distributed. For example, the sense of fear and anxiety has been articulated by both an Ofsted inspector and by a head teacher:

I know you're nervous but so am I. Your nervousness is well founded. You know my judgments are going to affect your future – and might put you out of work if things go badly. (Anonymous, 2013)

Usually the anticipation of an event is worse than the event itself. This is not my experience of Ofsted inspections. This is my fifth full inspection as a head and still my anxiety levels are high each time. I didn't sleep that night.

The hardest part of any inspection in some ways is the days that follow, with all the staff feeling shellshocked and exhausted. I could hardly string a sentence together. We are left dazed and battered in their wake.

Bergistra, 2012)

By comparison with the Scottish and Swedish inspection regimes, the Ofsted approach seems to place a dynamic of mistrust, suspicion and anxiety at the very heart of the process. It inflects the relationships between inspectors and inspected before, during and after the inspection.

Suspicious minds

The antagonistic relationships established in the first decade of Ofsted's work have been articulated in a culture of mutual suspicion and mistrust. The inspectorate apparently mistrusts at least some schools, teachers and local education authorities. In many respects, the proclaimed necessity of inspection (and other forms of evaluation and audit) rests on a fundamental principle of mistrust, as Onora O'Neill argued in her 2002 Reith Lectures (O'Neill, 2002). In the rise of neo-classical economic perspectives, public services have become particularly mistrusted because they are seen as relatively immune to the corrective disciplines of market forces. Ofsted, however, has become distinctively suspicious – of teachers, schools, school leaders and local authorities – being concerned that many have been evading their responsibilities. This suspicion has been reflected in continuing debates about short notice or no notice inspections to ensure that schools cannot conceal their true character by preparing for inspection. For example, Sir Michael Wilshaw commented that:

"Ofsted has been moving towards a position of unannounced school inspection over a period of years. I believe the time is now right for us to take that final step and make sure that for every school we visit inspectors are seeing schools as they really are in the corridors, classrooms and staffroom."
(in Vasagar, 2012)

This condition of suspicion appears endemic to inspection processes that are conceived as adversarial. In return, LEAs, teachers and schools mistrust Ofsted, the Chief Inspector and the inspection teams, not least because they recognise the distrust that is at stake in the inspection process. One Ofsted lead inspector reflected carefully on the distribution of trust and mistrust in the inspection process (at the point when the 'satisfactory' judgement was being replaced by 'in need of improvement'):

We've already moved haven't we? We've already moved to say that outstanding schools don't need inspecting, no one's had a moan about that have they?.

... so on the plus side they are saying 'we trust you ', if you want to ... we trust you . I think that's great. I do think if senior leaders and heads change that, well we should be risk assessing. But then at the other end of the scale, we are saying we don't trust you , satisfactory , we don't trust , you at the bottom line they are saying we don't trust you and satisfactory's not good enough...
[P4: lead inspector]

However, mistrust is not just a condition where there is a lack of trust: it is an active emotionally ordered relationship, involving doubt, scepticism, and – where power and its consequences are at stake – fear and anxiety. In classic psychoanalytic terms, debates around schools and inspection often involve 'Splitting' (the binary and absolutist distinction of Good and Bad) and projection (the phantastic imagery of bad and good people). Froggett describes the psychoanalytic basis of splitting as follows:

The splitting [of good and bad] protects the fragile developing ego by keeping the phantasy of the good apart from, and uncontaminated by, the bad. Although processes of psychic differentiation and integration will eventually allow the developing child to develop the capacity for ambivalence and the ability to relate to whole objects, splitting remains an integral part of the defensive repertoire – always the first to be mobilised when under threat. Welfare agencies, hospitals and schools are very familiar with splitting inc clients who rage against a particular worker while idealising another. This allows identification with an individual; who is protected from negative projections and becomes the bearer of hope for change; however it also defends against the need to come to terms with an imperfect and contradictory reality. (2002: 37)

The rhetorical landscape of schooling and inspection is littered with such distinctions (about pupils, about schools, and even about inspectors). Such distinctions do indeed speak to the problem of aligning classificatory/judgment systems with 'an imperfect and contradictory reality'. But the relational responses that come to operate are characteristically anxious, defensive and paranoid. As the earlier discussion of Perryman's work indicates, these

responses have been most visible among the inspected, but in our study we found that – at moments – they are also true for inspectors. So, one lead inspector pointed to the elaborate quality control arrangements that scrutinise the reports produced by inspectors, involving checks internal to the inspection provider organisations and then at Ofsted:

{B}ut the real difficulty for the providers is that, the report gets read by one of the quality readers then it comes back to me, then it goes to the school for a factual accuracy check , and it gets put together and gets sent to Ofsted for sign off .

Now Ofsted say no we are not signing it off, then it becomes a key performance indicator failure for the provider, so they are paranoid about this because they get slapped, I know because I was Director of Inspections for one of the contractors in the past, you get contract action notices that will say that unless you improve this will happen and you have to get it right , and of course once you do it that way and then HMI say no it has to be like this you end up , with a formula , I think that's part of an issue , that is why schools are saying er ... all these defences are going up. [P1: lead inspector]

In this brief extract, we can see the circulation of paranoia: among inspectors (writing reports); among inspection provider organizations (submitting reports) and among schools trying to protect themselves against the application of an inspection formula. This mode of inspection creates anxiety and uncertainty. While most discussion of this focuses on the schools and teachers, I think it is worth considering how the field of antagonistic relationships also affects the inspectors (individually and in teams) and Ofsted itself. The field of relationships (Ofsted-inspection provider companies–contracted inspectors–schools) is structured by a principle of uncertainty (about judgements to be made) that induces anxiety. There are institutionalised forms of mistrust that generate defensive reactions and fear. Indeed, Ofsted has often been aggressively defensive about its approach and its judgements, and at times appears offended by criticisms. For example, in 2014, it issued a ‘clarification for schools’ about the inspection process, claimed to confirm ‘facts about the

requirements of Ofsted and dispels myths that can result in unnecessary workloads in schools' (2014). In the text, the phrase 'Ofsted **does not**' (emphasis in original) recurs 16 times in two pages to disavow the demands erroneously attributed to the Ofsted process.

Widening the circuit of paranoia?

These paranoid dynamics extend beyond the Ofsted-contacted inspection-school circuit into the wider realm of public and political action. One small, but intriguing, example was provided by the current Chief Inspector in his address to the National Governors Association in 2012:

In my short time in the post I seem to have picked up something of a reputation and I am actually quite a nice man.

I promise you that not everything that's been written about me is true!

(Wilshaw, 2012).

This is, at least, an interesting rhetorical device – recognising a publicly contentious persona and attempting to disarm a potentially sceptical audience. But it might also be read as a paranoid defence against a hostile and judgemental world, which (he feels) is not sufficiently attentive to this 'contradictory reality'. Ofsted's defensiveness may seem strange in an apparently powerful and authoritative institution, but such features are not necessarily any defence against perceived hostility, antagonism and cruel (mis) judgement. Indeed, during 2014, The Chief Inspector and Ofsted found themselves the subjects of critical evaluations from 'sources close to government'. Two thinktanks with strong links to the Conservative Party delivered critical reports on Ofsted. Civitas argued that the Ofsted approach was stifling innovation in school organization and teaching, not least because of a 'progressive' or child-centred orthodoxy at Ofsted (Peal, 2014). The Policy Exchange report claimed that the inspection process was poorly staffed and produced unreliable and inconsistent judgements, while placing undue pressure on schools (Waldegrave and Simons, 2014). In January, the BBC reported on an angry Chief Inspector who feared that sources inside the

Department for Education, headed by Minister of Education Michael Gove, had been briefing against him:

Sir Michael told the Sunday Times he suspected the think tanks were being "informed by the Department for Education" - "possibly" Mr Gove's special advisers - and that he was "displeased, shocked and outraged".

"I am spitting blood over this and I want it to stop," he said.

Asked whether he wanted Mr Gove to call off the "attack dogs", the newspaper reported, he replied: "Absolutely."

He added: "It does nothing for [Michael Gove's] drive or our drive to raise standards in schools.

"I was never intimidated as a head teacher and I do not intend to be intimidated as a chief inspector."

(BBC News, 2014))

These are classically paranoid reactions to perceived threats and slights. This is not to suggest that the threats and slights were not real or intended to cause political damage. However, the response projects fears onto shadowy but powerful others (briefers in the Department of Education) and escalates the aggressive tone ('spitting blood', 'I will not be intimidated'). The anger and the projection of powerful enemies continued during 2014, with Wilshaw accusing 'vested interests' of trying to block his reforms in October (Hurst, 2014). At the same time, Ofsted was embroiled in a rather different field of political paranoia, with an investigation ("Trojan Horse") into claims that Muslim governors were taking over schools in Birmingham and elsewhere with the aim of promoting a curriculum and school ethos that deviated from 'British values'. Fears that the Birmingham experience was just the 'tip of the iceberg' of a plot to 'Islamise' British schools were voiced by the lead investigator, Peter Clarke ([Gilligan](#), 2014; see also Baxter 2014, and forthcoming).

This issue provides a further indication of the ways in which Ofsted operates within an expanding circuit of collective paranoia in which suspicion, mistrust, fear and anger are recurring features. This is not quite paranoia in the

classical Freudian sense, since it is not focused on a single ego, but it catches echoes of some of the symptoms attributed to paranoia as a defence mechanism: the sense of persecution, the projection of the power of the persecutors and the reviling of the persecutor (see, for example, Freud, 1914). There are interestingly suggestive echoes of Freud's work on the relationship between surveillance/judgement, internalized self-monitoring and perceived failure of the self to match up to the 'ideal ego' (it sounds like a model for an inspection system). However, my purpose is not to elaborate a Freudian analysis of Ofsted's mode of inspection and the social relationships in which it is enacted. Rather, I want to borrow the *idea* of paranoia (and its psychopathological echoes) as a way of describing this field of relationships and the circuits through which they are connected. This draws more on the socialization of paranoia as a concept for studying organizational or group dynamics (see, for example Marcus, 1994, and Mirowsky, 1998). Again, though, I think there is a difference between dealing with a field of relationships rather than one entity, even a collective one (organization or group).

Conclusion: emotional states and states of emotion?

This is a preliminary speculation and I am not sure where it might lead. This emotional intensity – and the circuit of paranoia that seems to suffuse the field of relationships – certainly marks the English inspection regime as different from those in Scotland and Sweden. Both of these certainly contains elements of anxiety and moments of suspicion, but they do not seem to dominate the field of relationships in the same way – and are tempered by other modes of interacting. So how might the intensity of the emotional register associated with Ofsted inspection be explained?

One starting point is to recognise that this inspection regime has produced a field of antagonistic relationships, which are reflected in the intensity of feeling in which positions, experiences, and aspirations are expressed. But 'reflection' is a poor conceptual tool for capturing these dynamics. Alternatively, this excess of emotion might be explained in terms of different rhetorical

possibilities: what ways of speaking are available to the different actors that constitute this 'system': inspectors, teachers, head teachers, local authorities, parents, etc. (and the children/pupils who are typically spoken for)? What cultural resources are available to represent personal, professional and organizational experiences in publicly acceptable, compelling or persuasive ways? Such resources might include affective vocabularies (stress, anxiety, fear, despair, anger and so on). There is a growing interest in the role and significance of discursive vocabularies of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; see also the earlier work of Scott and Lyman, 1968, on accounts). Such perspectives take a performative view of language – stressing the ways in which specific vocabularies legitimate, enable and bring into being particular courses of action. However these approaches tend to emphasise a rational view of vocabularies, rather than considering what affective/emotional repertoires may legitimate or enable. In this case, I suggest, it may be possible to develop an analysis of how the English inspection regime has accumulated a vocabulary of emotion through which a series of antagonistic relationships may be legitimately represented – and called into question. So, talk of stress, anxiety, fear, suspicion and mistrust draws on a collective vocabulary through which (some) actors located in this field may articulate their experiences and challenge the dominant instrumentalising vocabulary of inspection and improvement. There is, I think, some potential in thinking through the ways in which this emotional repertoire is mobilised, legitimised and deployed by different actors within this field. And yet, I am left with a question about what would happen if we took this richness of *feeling* about the relationships and practices of inspection more seriously?

An alternative starting point is the emerging literature on the psychosocial dynamics of public services, organisations and work (for example, Froggett, 2002; Hoggett, 2000; and Long, 2006). They point to the signs of stress, strain, and perverse dynamics in organisational and occupational settings. Long, indeed, has written of *perverse* organisations, though, sadly, not in terms of paranoia as a common organisational dynamic. Here I want to stretch this interest in collective or social psychodynamics beyond the specific organisation or occupation towards thinking of school inspection as a field of

relationships. In the English variant, as constituted through Ofsted's central role, this field contains – and perhaps is animated by – a shared paranoid sensibility. This is ingrained in habits and repetitions that have become normalised in circuits of recursive practices, such that anxiety, fear, suspicion and mistrust are recurrent, if not dominant, dispositions of the field.

It matters, I think, to be careful about the specificities of this argument. It is not my view that all inspection systems are characterised by paranoia, nor that all government/governance arrangements produce collective psychopathologies. Rather I want to suggest that this particular field of relationships has been constituted in such a way as to incline agents within the circuit to experience paranoid reactions. Wetherell's insistence on thinking about 'affective practices' is, I think, helpful in this respect. She argues that:

An affective practice approach, then, takes as its focus and its units of analysis patterns and cycles of activity that at a particular historical moment have become 'emotionalised' (understood through the conventional categories and vocabularies of emotion)

An affective practice typically pulls together or orders in relation to each other patterns of body/brain activity, patterns of meaning-making, feelings, perceptions, cognition and memories, interactional potentialities and routines, forms of accountability, appraisals and evaluations, subject positions and histories of relationships. (2013: 235-6).

This is a suggestive way of thinking about the Ofsted inspection regime as a circuit of paranoia, because it embeds the study of affect/emotion in specific configurations of relationships and practices. Her call for attention to 'cycles of activity' that have become 'emotionalised' addresses the distinctive qualities of this particular field of relationships – and the practices in which it is embodied. The actual and anticipated practice of inspection (and its reciprocal – being inspected) is enacted in patterns of activity and patterns of meaning-making that are simultaneously routinised and highly charged because of the political, professional, organizational and personal stakes. In the case of the Ofsted circuit, I would also want to add the dynamics of unequal relations of

power – the ‘fearful asymmetry’ of the title – experienced by different agents and agencies within this field to the analysis of how a paranoid field of relationships might be produced, reproduced and inhabited.

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