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Inspections: governing at a distance

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Chapter 1

Inspections: Governing at a Distance

John Clarke

In this chapter we establish some of the main lines of thinking that have informed our approach to studying school inspection. From the outset, we have been concerned with the work that inspection does as a means of governing schooling in our different settings. As a result the first section that follows locates our interest in the ever-expanding literatures on governance, governmentality and regulation, each of which lays claim to the challenge of thinking about how social organization is governed after government or the state. We locate our own interest in the processes and practices of governing in this landscape. More precisely, we explore ways in which inspection can be seen as one way of ‘governing at a distance’ and then consider the strange mixture of distance and proximity that inspection involves as a form of embodied regulation in the second section. In the third section, we borrow and develop the idea of assemblage as a way of thinking about how different forms of inspection are composed in the diverse settings of this study. Finally, we end with the ‘inspection question’ that has underpinned all our work on this project: Why inspect?

1. Inspection as Governing

We begin, though, from trying to think about inspection as governing. Concepts of *governance* have been central to developments in political science and the related fields of public policy, administration and management during the last three decades. These discussions have been dominated by ideas of a shift from ‘government’ (the practice of politics, policy and administration within the state-form) to ‘governance’ (involving co-production by many agents and agencies). Governance implies, at least, the permeability of states as institutions; the plurality of agencies involved in doing governance; and a shift from hierarchical, authoritative or bureaucratic forms of social coordination, typically towards the modes of markets and networks (see, for example, Kooiman 1993; Levi-Faur 2011; Pierre 2000; and Rhodes 1997; and the discussions

in Daly 2002; Newman 2001 and 2005; Offe 2009 and Walters 2004). Levi-Faur has suggested that governance addresses multiple changes:

The shifts are conceptualized in three different directions: upward (to the regional, transnational, intergovernmental and global), downward (to the local, regional, and the metropolitan) and horizontally (to private and civil spheres of authority). Some of the most dominant ways to think about shifts in governance include a shift from politics to markets, from community to markets, from politicians to experts, from political, economic and social hierarchies to de-centered markets, partnerships and networks; from bureaucracy to regulocracy, from service provision to regulation; from the positive state to the regulatory state; from big government to small government; from the national to the regional; from the national to the global; from hard power to soft power and from public authority to private authority. (2011: 8)

There are various tensions visible in governance arrangements: for example, between centralised and decentralised levels of governance, between deregulation and existing or new regulatory (re-regulation) instruments of governance within nation-states, and between the pressures for international or global convergence and embedded national practices and priorities. Indeed, the European political and governmental space has been one of the key settings identified by researchers in which the shift from government to governance or the emergence of a 'regulatory state' can be identified. In our view, however, governance theory in political science is not particularly well-equipped to consider such tensions and strains within and between modes of control. It retains an overly institutionalist view of agents, agencies and practices while typically operating with a 'thin' conception of the social fields that are being governed.

In some of our previous work we have explored *governmentality* as a way of thinking beyond governance (Ozga et al. 2011), but this move brings problems of its own: for example, the difficulty of combining the heterogeneity of micro-political analyses with a tendency towards 'epochal' analysis of liberal governmentality and its phases/forms; the separation of liberal governmentality from its constitutive colonial conditions; and some worries about tending to assume the 'success' of governmental

projects in practice (Clarke 2004; and 2009). These general problems in no sense deny the profoundly productive impact of ‘governmentality’ as an analytic framing for studies of states (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Sharma and Gupta 2006); of the formation and reform of welfare states (Larsson et al 2012); of neo-liberalism as a distinctive political rationality and project of governing (e.g., Brown 2005; Kingfisher 2002; Larner 2000); of forms of global governmentality (Larner and Walters 2004) and of the practices, strategies and failures of governmental projects (Li 2007).

As a consequence of the conceptual problems associated with both governance and governmentality, we have chosen to use the more theoretically agnostic term *governing*, because we were looking for ways of combining some of the undoubted advances of both governance and governmentality approaches with a focus on the complexity, contestation and translation of governing practices that avoided the system-theory or institutionalist based references of governance and the totalizing tendencies of governmentality. So here, we suggest treating inspection as a mode of governing, and conceptualising governing as composed of assemblages of apparatuses and agents, combined with places, policies, processes and practices, rather than merely institutions, discourses or strategies (see also Newman and Clarke 2009).

For us, *governing* is more helpful in pointing to a troubled and turbulent set of relationships, processes and practices that were once rather more comfortably identified as the state. Declining political enthusiasm for states, the proliferation of agencies and apparatuses performing governmental work within and beyond the nation-state, the fragmentation of the monolithic image of the state and the concurrent rise of markets, communities and civil societies as the sites of engagement and coordination have all brought states – and state-centric theorising – into question. This unsettling of the institutional, discursive and conceptual centrality of the state points to a more dispersed assemblage of apparatuses, personnel, and practices. Our approach here has been shaped by Davina Cooper’s innovative use of the concept as the basis from which to explore particular conflicts over authority, ownership and belonging, involving heterogeneous social forces and divergent conceptions of the ‘right to govern’ (1998). This emphasis on governing – as processes and practices - enables us to engage with different sites, apparatuses, relationships, policies, and

practices. However, it leaves a question about how to conceive of this field of heterogeneous loci in which the work of governing is carried out.

Previous work of ours (e.g., the Economic and Social Research Council funded *Governing by Numbers* project, 2006-2009) had a similar view of the diversity of articulated places, scales, practices and people involved in the work of governing. Janet Newman and John Clarke have argued for a view of state power and authority becoming more dispersed as more agencies and agents are enrolled into the business of governing (Clarke and Newman 1997; Newman and Clarke 2009). This idea of dispersal also offers a different understanding of the emergent organisational forms and relationships that make up the landscape of governance: quasi-markets, enforced contracts, compulsory partnerships and other 'hybrid' organisational forms. All of these ways of organising governance are marked by paradoxical, if not contradictory, dynamics that derive in part from the processes of state authorization (and the ties of funding, strategic direction, accountability, responsibility, scrutiny that are involved in states' attempts to manage this new landscape). For us, then, governing still implies forms of the state but points to the dispersed and diverse arrangements through which politics, projects and policies are turned into practice. Indeed, one key feature of governing may be the effort to impose coherence on these diverse and dispersed apparatuses.

We find it helpful to think about governing as a field organised around *projects*. Projects start from conceptions of how things should be. These conceptions (maps, plans, objectives, ambitions, aspirations, visions) provide the framing principles that governing processes and practices attempt to make come true. These might be social projects, political projects, policy projects, or organisational projects, but they all involve imagined futures, proposed solutions to current problems, or routes to improvement. Governing processes provide some the means of translation - the means of making these projects, imaginaries or fantasies come true. Even the most apparently dull and functional processes of governing share this projective character. Such processes also involve practices - particular types of people doing specific things to realise the project (and, of course, often more than one project at a time). Practices point us to the **work** of governing (Clarke 2012). Projects, policies, schemes, strategies do not just come true by virtue of being announced.

Governing requires agents and agencies to make projects and plans come true. It involves distinctive forms of labour carried out in complex and shifting organizational settings. What was once part of government (in its state-centred sense) is now sometimes performed by non-governmental agencies (NGOs) or quasi-governmental agencies (QUANGOs), or government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs). These new organizational forms (Newman and Clarke 2009) bring new labour processes into being, require new sorts of worker, new sorts of expertise and knowledge, and involve the construction and maintenance of relationships of governing authority.

We take from political science the key idea that governance involves different agents—individuals, groups, organizations, a view that locates inspection in a web of relationships that together attempt to steer or govern ‘at a distance’ (Rhodes 1997; Kooiman 2000; see also Rose 1999), drawing on different kinds of authority and expertise (or claims to expertise). Again, these networks or partnerships may be distinguished in relation to their ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ governing capacities: some networks, relationships and forms of authority are more directive or coercive than others. Clarke (2012) points to the ways in which these processes require particular types of ‘agent’ to make them work. These agents need to be created and enrolled into the practices of governing. Such agents must possess or acquire the relevant ‘expertise’ to govern.

Later in the book, we will explore the particular relationships between knowledge, judgment and authority in the processes of school inspection. But these are particular examples of a more general set of connections between modes of governing and the forms of knowledge and expertise that are currently valorised in governance arrangements. A significant set of currently valued forms of knowledge derive from the field of what Cutler and Waine (1997) call ‘generic management’: the presumption that all organisations share common characteristics, and thus can be directed using a set of universal principles, knowledge and skills. This has been a significant force in both the reform of schooling as a field, and in the modes of governing it. At times, this valorization of ‘generic management’ has blurred into what O’Reilly and Reed (2010) call ‘leaderism’ in public services – manifested in the tendency to call senior school staff ‘school leaders’. But inspection engages other

sorts of knowledge too – ‘hard data’ about school and pupil performance, professional expertise about teaching; the ‘lay’ views of pupils and parents, knowledge about the legal conditions of schooling and more. These exist in particular – and shifting – combinations in particular inspection regimes and form a critical part of the claims to authority on the part of inspectors and inspection agencies.

One of the significant features of inspection as a mode of governing is its embodied character – that inspectors are ‘on site’ for their work, a physical and social presence in the schools being inspected. The idea of *embodied regulation* provides a way of thinking about this particularly distinctive form of authoritative action. Like governance, ideas of regulation have become a focus for new work in the social sciences reflecting on changes in economic, political and social organization. For many researchers, the growth in regulation, particularly the increasing number of *regulatory agencies*, has been one of the most striking features of the ‘new governance’ or what is conventionally described as the shift from ‘government to governance’. And, as with governance, there have been many different definitions and uses of the term regulation, from an interest in ideas of the ‘regulatory state’ (Majone 1997) or ‘regulatory capitalism’ (Gilardi 2005) to a concern with the multiple forms of control and shaping that led Scott to define regulation as "any process or set of processes by which norms are established, the behavior of those subject to the norms monitored or fed back into the regime, and for which there are mechanisms for holding the behavior of regulated actors within the acceptable limits of the regime..." (Scott 2001: 283). As with governance and governmentality, there appears to be no limit to the process, activities or relationships that are not in some sense regulatory. In an abstract sense, since there are always many ways in which conduct may be conducted (in Foucault’s terms), the social landscape will always be busy with governing/regulatory practices.

Although that orientation is important (all forms of social order are the results of efforts to order them), it makes understanding the specificities of time and space and the significance of particular practices rather elusive. So, we think it is provisionally worth making a number of distinctions when approaching inspection as embodied regulation. First, inspection is currently being put to work as part of the systematic reorganization of the relationships between states, publics and public services. It is

one means of enacting the ‘public interest’ in such shifting alignments and is part of the emergence of modes of ‘governing at a distance’ (as discussed above). Second it has regulatory ambitions: it aims to guide (and discipline) the behaviour of relatively autonomous agencies and agents (schools and their staff; and possibly – at a further distance – parents of school children, too), Third, inspection-as-regulation involves public/governmental authority, even as this is dispersed to agencies and is interwoven with other sources of authority (professional judgement, for example). In these ways, our use of the idea of regulation gets closer to Levi-Faur’s attempt to narrow its scope to:

the promulgation of prescriptive rules as well as the monitoring and enforcement of these rules by social, business, and political actors on other social, business, and political actors. These rules will be considered as regulation as long as they are not formulated directly by the legislature (primary law) or the courts (verdict, judgment, ruling and adjudication). In other words, regulation is about bureaucratic and administrative rule making and not about legislative or judicial rule making. This does not mean that for other scholarly purposes they shouldn't be included. Nor does it mean that legislatures or courts are not important engines for regulatory expansion and of course does not mean that they cannot be critical actors in the regulatory space. The definition emphasizes the role of diverse sets of actors in this process in order to point to the importance of hybrid elements in the systems that govern our “life plans”. (2010: 10)

This locates regulation within a wider sense of governance/governing, and places an important emphasis on the agencies and practices by which regulation is done. Levi-Faur (2010) draws particular attention to the diverse types of organization that enact regulation, arguing that they work across conventional institutional boundaries (between state and markets, or governmental and non-governmental, for example). This variety includes ‘hybrid’ forms that combine organizational characteristics, imperatives and forms of authority from different locations. In the course of this book, we will see the different organizational forms in which school inspection is currently embedded in the Swedish, Scottish and English cases. Furthermore, Levi-Faur suggests that the growth of regulation as a governing process increasingly separated

from policy-making and policy delivery creates the conditions for regulation to emerge as “a distinct profession and administrative identity. Professional affiliation to global networks of experts becomes a major source of innovations, world views, accountability, and legitimacy” (2010: 19). The relationship between authority, expertise and legitimacy is a critical one for the work of school inspection – and it is inhabited differently in our three cases.

2. Distance and proximity: governing as embodied regulation

Inspection, audit and similar evaluative approaches to controlling public services have been described as means of ‘governing at a distance’ – exercising direction, authority and control without the immediate authority of line management or hierarchical bureaucratic systems. In one approach to this issue, Rose has argued that:

Political forces instrumentalize forms of authority other than those of ‘the state’ in order to ‘govern at a distance’. In both constitutional and spatial senses – distanced constitutionally, in that they operate through the decisions of non-political modes of authority; distanced spatially, in that these technologies of government link a multitude of experts in distant sites to the calculations of those at the centre – hence government operates through opening lines of force across a territory spanning time and space. (1999: 50).

This has proved to be an unusually fecund orientation, being deployed in a variety of studies, including those of how states have been finding ways to govern the social and varieties of social provision without direct lines of command and control. At stake in many of these studies is the inculcation or distribution of ‘responsibility’ away from government to the individual (person, household, organisation) ‘set free’ from authoritative control. In one critical line of development, studies have explored the ways in which forms of audit and related types of scrutiny have invited (or perhaps incited) organisations and individuals to imagine themselves as auditable or inspectable (see Power 1997). Certainly, in the education context, the drive towards governing at a distance has articulated self-evaluation and responsibility as imperatives that connect pupils (and parents, of course), teachers, schools, and governmental systems.

However, as John Allen (2003) has argued, this ‘distance’ over which governing takes place implies forms of spatial relationship that might benefit from more careful attention. Our study of inspection makes visible several different forms of ‘distance’: most obviously, the *governmental distance* associated with a disaggregated or dispersed state (Slaughter 2004; Clarke and Newman 1997). This is the distance between the central state and locally produced and delivered services (in this case, schooling/education). It is the distance – the ‘arm’s length’ – between strategy (or targets) and implementation; and it is traversed by a number of devices: policy statements, targets, regulatory agencies, forms of conditionality (e.g., attaching to performance standards), data collection, display and publicity (e.g., in ‘league tables’) and the process of inspection itself.

Nevertheless, this governmental distance is itself constituted differently in the three cases of Sweden, Scotland and England – in geographical, political and social terms. The physical distances between places – especially between centres of government and local schools - differ. Spatial distances are also social: indeed, Scotland and Sweden self-consciously identify themselves as ‘small societies’ with short social distances between government and citizens, and between policy makers and practitioners. In the three societies, the governmental distance between centre and local is politically mediated in different ways (with more significant roles for local authorities/municipalities in Scotland and Sweden than in England). How does Inspection function across these different arms’ lengths? It appears that in both Scotland and to some extent Sweden, Inspection operates as though the distances are shorter, in that the professional, collegial, supportive-developmental practices of inspection aim to solicit the participation (and indeed self-evaluation) of the inspected. In England, by contrast, Ofsted appears to have maintained – if not actively intensified – the sense of distance implied in the ‘arm’s length’ relationship. It represents itself, and is experienced (not always happily), as an external, ‘independent’ agent of critical evaluation and judgement.

These observations point to other sorts of distance that are a stake here: varieties of *institutional, organisational and professional distance*. In Scotland, and possibly to a lesser extent in Sweden (given the significant role of legal rationality and

juridification), Inspection has been understood as *both* evaluative and developmental. That is, there has been an effort – in theory and practice – to reduce the institutional and professional distance between inspectors and inspected. In Scotland, this extends to a participatory approach to the inspection visit (inspectors interacting in the classroom) and, most recently, towards the PRAISE framework for inspector training and the intention to build psychological and counselling skills into the training of inspectors. By contrast, Ofsted seems committed to producing and maintaining a more formalised and distant relationship between inspectors and inspected. The recent House of Commons Select Committee report on Ofsted emphasised (in the face of contesting arguments), the importance of observation and judgement over active involvement in improvement:

32. ...The role of the Education Inspectorate should be, firstly, to inspect institutions and to provide judgments and recommendations which can drive better outcomes for individual children, young people and learners; and, secondly, to provide an overview of the education system as a whole. It should not aim to be an improvement agency, although inspection should of course hold up a mirror to an institution's failings and recommend areas for improvement without dictating how that improvement should come about. (House of Commons Committee on Education 2011: 14)

Nevertheless, all inspection systems involve forms of distance, including the social and professional distance between those who work in schools and those who visit 'from the outside' (however different that outside might be). Governments – and ministries of Education, in particular – worry recurrently about how to manage, maintain or modify those forms of distance to make inspection efficient and effective (with the ambition of making schooling more efficient and effective). For us, trying to take 'distance' seriously (in its many forms) makes visible important differences in the national assemblages of school inspection, in particular the different ways in which the 'arm's length' between government and school is understood and bridged. As a result, we think there may be some value in exploring more widely how different strategies and practices that have been clustered under the concept of 'governing at a distance' both imagine those distances and enact governing across them. In a recent

contribution to spatial analysis, John Allen has explored the difference between topographical and topological conceptions of space – and distance:

In a conventional topographic landscape, power has both location and extension, as do all ‘things’, and supposes physical distances which consist of measurable spans of the globe which tell us what is near and what is far, and who, in terms of power-geometries is capable of controlling such distances to gain advantage. In a topological frame, by way of contrast, power relationships are not so much positioned in space or extended across it, as compose the spaces of which they are a part. Distanciated ties and real-time connections are not understood as lines on a map which cut across territories, but rather as intensive relationships which create the distances between powerful and not so powerful actors. Power-topologies come into play when the reach of actors enables them to make their presence felt in more or less powerful ways that cut across proximity and distance (Allen 2011: 284)

This is a potentially productive approach to thinking about what is involved in governing at several distances. The comments about ‘intensive relationships’ that both produce and work across forms of distance are very suggestive for the challenges of thinking about the varying assemblages and practices of inspection. Indeed, inspection might be characterised as a form of *intermittently* ‘intensive relationship’ between the inspectors and the inspected. We will return to these issues later in this chapter and in the book as a whole, but this is part of the challenge of thinking of ‘distance’ in multiple ways (not merely a measurable metric).

This aspect of the practice of inspection – its embodied presence – poses questions that take us beyond the strongly institutional or organizational focus of the fast growing literature on regulation which tends to treat the agencies, rather than the agents, as the central object of inquiry. This misses the dimension of ‘embodiment’ that we have already suggested is important for the work of school inspection. Questions of embodied practices appear in a variety of not always connected literatures: feminism (e.g. Braidotti 1991; Butler 1993); performance studies (e.g., Sibafest 2010; Jackson 2011); pedagogy (Davidson 2004; Perry and Medina 2011) and the sociology of knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991). The last of these raises

particularly salient questions about the types of knowledge and authority, not least, as Fourcade puts it: ‘about the social conditions under which embodied knowledge—in my definition, a form of knowledge that cannot be easily dissociated from the personal qualities of its bearer— becomes legitimate and the conditions under which it is dismissed as irrelevant.’ (2010: 570). In the context of inspection, then, we might ask: in what ways is organizational, rational-legal, bureaucratic authority combined with personal, professional or embodied knowledge (founded on direct observation, interpersonal interaction, and the exercise of judgement) to produce authoritative outcomes? What is that the embodied presence of the inspector adds to the process of regulation? Perhaps equally significant is the reverse question: does the embodied practice of inspection detract anything from the regulation of schooling? Fourcade suggests that embodied knowledge runs the risk of being ‘dismissed as irrelevant’, but later suggests that the presence of an infrastructure of rules and conditions of collection and a centralised reporting system may enable personal observations to transcend being dismissed as ‘merely a mass of observations’ (2010: 571-2).

This embodied character of inspection as regulation points to a further set of issues about social relations and social practices: the ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams 1961) associated with particular forms of social organization. The bodies of inspectors – as well as those of teachers, school leaders, governors, municipal officers, pupils and parents – are implicated in creating and managing affective ‘atmospheres’ (Anderson 2009). Inspections are anticipated (with excitement, anxiety or dread); they are conducted interpersonally and interactively (in particular styles of engagement); and they produce both formal outcomes and affective effects (from satisfaction to frustration; from elation to exhaustion). The character of inspection as embodied regulation makes such dynamics more visible (although no form of governing can be imagined as free of affect/emotion). In what follows, we try to be attentive to these complex ways in which embodiment and affect are entangled in the practices of inspecting schools. In doing so, we draw from the approach to ‘affective practices’ being developed in Wetherell’s work (2012 and 2013) in which she argues for the need to combine attention to the ways in which the patterning of affecting events is powerful with a recognition of the emergent quality of social practices. This practice orientation has some productive affinities with our interest in inspection as a practice of embodied regulation.

3. Assembling Inspection

The problems and processes of governing education at a distance vary from context to context, and in our case, within our three countries. They are all engaged in difficult relationships with their past (the inheritances of both schooling and school inspection), with the crises and challenges of the present, and with the desire to create a better future. These are the elementary temporal framings of governmental projects – and they shape the discourses, policies and practices of inspection in each of our country cases. Such governmental projects need governing agents, either objects or bodies, which can circulate with tools and templates, standards and procedures, and specialist discourses. They need to represent the system to be governed, and they need to have plans to improve it and arguments to legitimate the processes of reform or improvements. Each of these forms of inspecting schooling takes place in a specific national context, but no national context is a closed space. Each national governmental space interacts with other national spaces, but also with other spaces: the Nordic region, the European space or the global world imagined in terms of economic and educational competition (Cameron and Palan 2004).

While global or European influences and pressures may frame and affect national choices, they do not determine them and our three countries appear to be heading along different routes. Firstly, there are significant divergences in their *organizational arrangements*; for example, the late 20thC abolition and then later reintroduction of Inspection in Sweden; the nominal continuity of the Inspectorate in Scotland even though its functions altered over time, and the creation and enlargement of the English Ofsted as an agency, organized around a business model of subcontracted inspection. Similarly, the location of inspection in the *institutional architecture of government* appears to be different over time and from each other: its place in government and with government departments, agencies and ministries of education, and consequently its relationship to, influence on, the policy processes varies. Thirdly, the *processes of professional formation* have become dissimilar as the maintenance of a professionalized, high status inspectorate in Scotland, the establishment of a new multi-professional architecture of inspection in Sweden and the production of a subcontracted flexible English inspector show. The *conduct of inspection* is travelling

down diverging tracks as the Scottish system emphasizes self-evaluation and collaboration, the Swedish system a juridical model of compliance, and the English offer a highly standardized and regulated system of swift intervention. Finally, systems are founded upon divergent *models of inspecting relationship* from the Scottish commitment to the evaluating professional, the Swedish model of legal relations, and the shock troop model within system mistrust in England. These are all significant differences in systems that are still changing and are faced with challenging governing contexts.

We have found it useful to treat the different national inspection regimes as ‘assemblages’, composed of heterogeneous elements (Ong and Collier 2005; Newman and Clarke 2009). These elements might include:

- places (offices, headquarters, settings of inspection –but also virtual places, for example websites);
- people (types of agent: the inspectors, the inspected and others, such as the public, the parents, the politicians);
- policies (the rules and guidelines for conducting inspection);
- practices (the relationships, habits, feelings and actions involved in inspecting) and
- power (the articulated formations of types of knowledge, expertise, judgment and authority).

In each country (and at different moments in time), these elements are put together in distinctive combinations as forms of inspection. Although they are all inspection, and indeed are all in the business of governing at a distance, their characteristic organising logics and practices vary. The concept of assemblage helps us to think about the variety of inspection without assuming that there is a singular norm from which other examples deviate in greater or lesser fashion (a risk in comparative studies). In what follows we will be exploring this mixture of similarity and variation in the assemblages of inspection in Sweden, Scotland and England.

4. The Inspection Question

What differentiates inspection as a mode of governing at a distance? This is a critical question, since inspection remains a significant technique in the proliferating new ways of governing public services that have been constructed in many countries since the 1980s. However, national inspectorates have a much longer history as a means of governing both services (such as education, policing, prisons) and fields of practice (for example, factories or Health and Safety) and provided a distinctive institutional form in which the public interest came to be *embodied* in inspectors. In part, then, the ‘inspection question’ is a question about the persistence of a 19th century mode of governing into the new state/governance formations of the 21st century: Why has inspection persisted as a governing practice? Inspection remains a practice that contributes to the challenges of governing at a distance alongside other practices that states have developed: for example, surveillance, evaluation, audit and multiplying forms of data capture and analysis. For us, several key features mark this distinctiveness of inspection. It is:

1. *directly observational* of sites, practices and people. That is, inspectors are empowered (and required) to enter the world of the school and observe what takes place within that environment, in contrast to collected and reported quantitative data.
2. a form of *qualitative evaluation*, involving the exercise of *judgement* rather than the calculation of statistical regularity/deviation. Judgement is at the core of the activity and thus raises important questions about the articulations of knowledge, expertise and power.
3. *embodied* evaluation: the inspector is a distinctive type of agent whose presence is required at the site of inspection and who embodies inspectorial knowledge, judgement and authority.

It is difficult to over-emphasise the first point: inspection persists as a form of governing work in a milieu where standards, bench-marking, targets and the routine collection of performance data has become central to governing at a distance. As Ozga and Simola have argued about the rise of data in educational governance:

Because the processes that create indicators and rankings are characterised as ‘technical’ or ‘scientific’ they are what Rose (1999: 198), has called an inscription device, that is **they constitute that which they seek to represent**. Numbers thus become a ‘rhetorical technique for ‘black boxing’ – that is to say, rendering invisible and hence incontestable – the complex array of judgements and decisions that go into a measurement, a scale, a number’ (Rose 1999: 208).

Thus the basis of knowledge has changed -especially in relation to the speed of retrieval and transfer of knowledge- (Thrift 2004; Delanty 2001) and so governing, too has changed, and they are now closely interdependent. Knowledge is (governing) power, and governance steers knowledge. The system has moved from governing through implicit assumptions and highly contextualised knowledge to one in which performance is made visible and transparent. It has shifted from one in which local government and schools were relatively closed from public and central government gaze, to a situation where they are rendered visible and calculable. (Ozga and Simola, 2011: 150; in Ozga et al. 2011)

In determining the space for inspection’s persistence as a mode of governing, it is important to consider some of the potential limitations and uncertainties associated with ‘governing by numbers’. First, and despite the claims to scientific validity, objectivity and truthfulness, statistical data remains problematic and potentially unreliable. The agents who collect it may try to manage the representation of performance; the indicators chosen may not be adequate to the reality they are intended to convey; and performance management systems are persistently vulnerable to problems of ‘gaming’ as evaluated organisations and actors try to manufacture success. As a result, the apparent ‘hardness’ of statistical fact is itself an artefact (Poovey 1998).

Second, performance data may not convey an understanding of the processes and practices that have produced the result. Data may enable comparison across particular performance criteria and enable the tracking of progress across time. But there are continuing problems of knowing how particular outcomes are produced. The internal world of the school and the classroom produce measurable effects – but observation

(as practised by knowledgeable observers) continues to be seen as a means of understanding *how* those effects have occurred. Inspection might provide such knowledge – and in ways that increase the possibility of managing those conditions to bring about improvement.

Third, inspection overcomes, at least partially, some of the distances involved in governing at a distance. The dismantling of integrative state bureaucracies in the move towards market-like, devolved, decentralized and dispersed systems of ‘delivering’ public services like schooling generates a variety of tensions, strains and risks that are centred on the problem of how to make autonomy ‘relative’. That is, the drive to ‘liberate’ organizations such as schools from the ‘dead hand’ of state bureaucratic control is not an unconditional promise. Governments worry about the dangers of unconstrained freedoms. As a result, devices and technologies for creating autonomy and regulating it have proliferated, but the threat/promise of inspection involves the authority of the state becoming temporarily present in the space of relative autonomy. This leads to some ambiguities about the forms of authority that inspectors embody to which we will return.

Finally, inspection involves judgements of quality – of individual, organizational, professional, and managerial performance. That is, it has something to add to the evaluation of ‘quality’ in education: it can speak of the distribution of skills, competences, capacities of different kinds and how they are situationally combined. As a consequence, it exists in troubled relationship with the professional (and managerial) judgements of those being assessed.

Possibly some combination of these different dynamics might explain the persistence of inspection in the new worlds of governing at a distance: but it remains a puzzling question for us. It is a puzzle with immediate – and political – resonance. If Finland is the leading educational performer in the OECD world and the new point of comparative reference, how has it attained this status without having Inspection?ⁱ

So far, we have talked about inspection as a distinctive practice: one mode of governing at a distance. It is certainly important to identify the characteristics that distinguish inspection as a practice from others such as data driven performance

management or audit (and thus be able to pose the question of how they combine in specific assemblages of governing). Both historical and comparative investigations remind us that there is no single and unchanging form of inspection.

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ⁱ A recent UK Parliamentary Select Committee report on Ofsted stumbled over this puzzle, indicating that: 'there are major differences between our education system and Finland's which do support the retention of school inspection in this country' (House of Commons, 2011: 16). At the centre of these differences is the fact that socio-economic variations explain much less of differential educational performance in Finland. The Committee observed that UK and Finland are also different countries:

It is worthy of note that Finland is, in many respects, a very different country to the UK. The population is dramatically smaller (5.4m compared with 62m) and there is substantially less immigration. Politically, Finland is commonly governed by Coalitions; geographically, it is very large with a very sparsely populated north. (ibid: 50)

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