Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique

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> I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label of a footnote with a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation. As long as one does that, one is regarded as someone who knows and reveres Marx, and will be suitably honoured in the so-called Marxist journals. But I quote Marx without saying so, without quotation marks, and because people are incapable of recognising Marx's texts I am thought to be someone who doesn't quote Marx. When a physicist writes a work of physics, does he feel it necessary to quote Newton and Einstein?
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> —Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*

Étienne Balibar once wrote that Foucault's work is characterized by some kind of "genuine struggle" with Marx (1992, 39), this struggle being one of the principal sources of its productivity. According to Balibar, Foucault moved in his theoretical development from a rupture with Marxism as a theory to a "tactical alliance," the use of some Marxist concepts or some concepts compatible with Marxism.[1] I completely agree with this observation and, indeed, I would like to deal in more detail with one of these concepts: the concept of governmentality. At the same time I don't think Balibar is right in stating that the differences between Marx and Foucault are due to the fact that the latter adheres to a "materialism of the body" which concentrates on the critique of disciplinary techniques. In fact, Balibar does not take into account important theoretical changes in Foucault's work, especially after publication of volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* (1979), which resulted in the appearance of the problematics of government, which is much closer to a Marxist perspective than Balibar observed.

In this paper I would like to address two questions. First, why does the problem of government assume a central place in Foucault's work? Second, how could this concept serve to analyze and criticize contemporary neoliberal practices?

The Genealogy of Governmentality

Foucault's work after *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is characterized by two, seemingly disparate projects. On the one hand, there is his interest in political rationalities and the "genealogy of the state," which he investigates in a series of lectures, articles, and interviews. On the other, there is a concentration on ethical questions and the "genealogy of the subject," which is the theme of his book project on the history of sexuality. The "missing link" between these two research interests is the problem of government. It is a *link* because Foucault uses it exactly to analyze the connections between what he called technologies of the self and technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state. It is *missing* because Foucault developed the notion in his lectures of 1978 and 1979 at the Collège de France and the material is almost entirely unpublished—at the moment, available only on audiotape. Since in the 1980s Foucault concentrated on his history of sexuality and the "genealogy of ethics," the problematics of government as the greater context of his work is still quite unknown.

The lectures of 1978 and 1979 focus on the "genealogy of the modern state" (Lect. 5 April 1978/1982b, 43). Foucault coins the concept of "governmentality" as a "guideline" for the analysis he offers by way of historical reconstructions embracing a period starting from ancient Greece through to modern neoliberalism (Foucault 1997b, 67). The semantic linking of governing (*gouverner*) and modes of thought (*mentalité*) indicates that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them. But there is a second aspect of equal importance. Foucault uses the notion of government in a comprehensive sense geared strongly to the older meaning of the term and adumbrating the close link between forms of power and processes of subjectification. While the word government today possesses solely a political meaning, Foucault is able to show that up until well into the eighteenth century, the problem of government was placed in a more general context. Government was a term discussed not only in political tracts but also in philosophical, religious, medical, and pedagogical texts. In addition to management by the state or the administration, "government" also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, and so forth. For this reason, Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as "the conduct of conduct" and thus as a term that ranges

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1. In a similar vein Roberto Nigro states that a permanent "*Auseinandersetzung*" with Marx (the German word captures the double sense of confrontation and combat) lies at the very heart of Foucault's work (2001, 433).

from "governing the self" to "governing others." All in all, in his history of govern-mentality Foucault endeavors to show how the modern sovereign state and the mod-ern autonomous individual codetermine each other's emergence (Lect. 8 February 1978/1982b, 16–7; Foucault 1982a, 220–1; Senellart 1995).[2]

The concept of governmentality has correctly been regarded as a "key notion" (Allen 1991, 431) or a "deranging term" (Keenan 1982, 36) of Foucault's work. It plays a decisive role in his analytics of power in several regards: it offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centers either on consensus or on violence; it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the sub-ject to the formation of the state; and finally, it helps to differentiate between power and domination. Let's take up one aspect after the other.

(1) Foucault's work of the 1970s had a central reference point: the critique of the "juridico-political discourse" (Foucault 1979, 88). His thesis was that this model of power underpins both liberal theories of sovereignty and dogmatic Marxist concep-tions of class domination. While the former claim that legitimate authority is codi-fied in law and it is rooted in a theory of rights, the latter locates power in the economy and regards the state as an instrument of the bourgeoisie. The common assumption of these very heterogeneous conceptions is the idea that power is something that can be possessed (by a class or the state, an elite or the people), that it is primarily repres-sive in its exercise, and that it can be located in a single, centralized source like the state or the economy (Foucault 1980, 78–109; Hindess 1996).

In criticizing the central role that mechanisms of law and legitimation by con-sensus received in the juridical conception of power, Foucault in his work until the mid-1970s saw the central mode of power foremost in war and struggle: "Nietzsche's hypothesis," as he called it (see Foucault 1997a, 15–9; 1980, 91). But even in his negation of the juridico-discursive concept of power, he remained in-side this problematic of legitimation and law. In claiming that the strategic con-ception should provide the "exact opposite" (1980, 97) of the juridical model, Foucault accepted the juridical model by simply negating it: instead of consensus and law, he insisted on constraint and war; instead of taking the macroperspective of the state and centering on the power holders, he preferred to investigate the microphysics of power and anonymous strategies. In sum, the aim was to "cut off the head of the king" (1979, 89) in political analysis, displacing the focus on law and legitimization, will and consensus. But by rejecting the juridical model and adopting the opposite view, Foucault reversed it. Instead of cutting off the king's head, he just turned the conception that he criticized upside down by replacing law and contract by war and conquest. Put differently, the "cutting off" could only be the first step. After this, it is necessary to address the following question: "How is

2. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to give a summary of these courses (see Lemke 1997, 2001; Gordon 1991). Instead, in this paper I want to show why the concept of governmentality occu-pies a central place in Foucault's work and how it could be used as a tool to criticize contemporary neoliberal strategies.

it possible that this headless body often behaves *as if* it indeed had a head?" (Dean 1994, 156; emphasis in original).[3]

Introducing the problematics of government, Foucault takes up this question. He now underlines that power is foremost about guidance and *Führung*: that is, governing the forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects. This concept of power as guidance does not exclude consensual forms or the recourse to violence. It signifies that coercion or consensus are reformulated as means of government among others; they are rather "effects" or "instruments" than the "foundation" or "source" of power relationships (Foucault 1982a, 219–22). "Foucault's hypothesis"—as I propose to call it by contrast with Nietzsche's hypothesis—is characterized by inquiring into the conditions of a consensus or the prerequisites of acceptance. As a consequence, the concept of governmentality represents a theoretical move beyond the problematics of consensus and will, on the one hand, and conquest and war, on the other: "The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power), but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, *neither warlike nor juridical*, which is government" (Foucault 1982a, 221; emphasis added).

(2) This takes us to the second feature of governmentality. Governmentality is introduced by Foucault to study the "autonomous" individual's capacity for self-control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. In this regard, Foucault's interest in processes of subjectivation does not signal that he abandons the problematics of power but, on the contrary, displays a continuation and correction of his older work that renders it more precise and concrete. It is right to speak of a "break," but this rupture is not between the genealogy of power and a theory of the subject but inside the problematics of power. The concept of power is not abandoned but the object of a radical "theoretical shift" (Foucault 1985a, 6). Foucault corrects the findings of the earlier studies in which he investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to "docile bodies" and had too strongly stressed processes of discipline. Now the notion of government is used to investigate the relations between technologies of the self and technologies of domination (see Foucault 1988a).

> I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. Let's say: he has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques—techniques of domination and techniques of the self. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we

3. Two French Marxist thinkers, Michel Pêcheux (1984) and Nicos Poulantzas (1977), were among the first to address these theoretical problems and to try to formulate a productive critique of Foucault's conception of power.

can call, I think government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself. (Foucault 1993, 203–4)

(3) Foucault introduces a differentiation between power and domination which is only implicit in his earlier work. He insists that "we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties—strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others—and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies: (1988b, 19). It follows that Foucault identifies three types of power relations: strategic games between liberties, government, and domination.

Power as *strategic games* is a ubiquitous feature of human interaction insofar as it signifies structuring the possible field of action of others. This can take many forms (e.g., ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation), but it does not necessarily mean that power is exercised against the interests of the other part of a power relationship, nor does it signify that "to determine the conduct of others" is intrinsically "bad." Moreover, power relations do not always result in a removal of liberty or options available to individuals. On the contrary, power in the sense that Foucault gives to the term could result in an "empowerment" or "responsibilization" of subjects, forcing them to "free" decisionmaking in fields of action.

Government refers to more or less systematized, regulated and reflected modes of power (a "technology") that go beyond the spontaneous exercise of power over others, following a specific form of reasoning (a "rationality") which defines the telos of action or the adequate means to achieve it. Government, then, is "the regulation of conduct by the more or less rational application of the appropriate technical means" (Hindess 1996, 106). For example, in his lectures on the "genealogy of the state," Foucault distinguishes between the Christian pastorate as a spiritual government of the souls oriented to salvation in another world and state reason as a political government of men securing welfare in this world. In much the same way, disciplinary or sovereign power are reinterpreted not as opposite forms of power but as different technologies of government.

Domination is a particular type of power relationship that is both stable and hierarchical, fixed and difficult to reverse. Foucault reserves the term "domination" for "what we ordinarily call power" (1988b, 19). Domination refers to those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room for maneuver because their "margin of liberty is extremely limited" (12). But states of domination are not the primary source for holding power or exploiting asymmetries; on the contrary, they are the effects of technologies of government. Technologies of government account for the systematization, stabilization and regulation of power relationships that may lead to a state of domination (see Hindess 1996; Patton 1998; Lazzarato 2000).

Neoliberalism and Critique

How could this theoretical framework be used for a critique of neoliberalism? The relevance and the potential contribution of the concept of governmentality may become clearer if we compare it with the dominant forms of criticism of neoliberal practices. Very schematically, we find three main lines of analysis that are shared among a large alliance, from sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu to proponents of Marxist theory—even if their respective political and theoretical positions differ considerably. First, neoliberalism is treated as a manipulative "wrong knowledge" of society and economy that must be replaced by a right or emancipatory—which means scientific or "impartial"—knowledge. Often criticism focuses on "inherent contradictions" or the "faulty theory" of neoliberalism that could not stand the light of the "true" laws of society and the "real" mechanisms of politics: neoliberalism as an ideology. Second, critics see in neoliberalism the extension of economy into the domain of politics, the triumph of capitalism over the state, the globalization that escapes the political regulations of the nation-state. This diagnosis is followed by the appropriate therapy. The (defensive) strategy aims to "civilize" a "barbaric" capitalism that has nowadays gone beyond control; the emphasis is put on reregulation and reembedding: neoliberalsim as an economic-political reality. The third line of criticism is leveled against the destructive effects of neoliberalism on individuals. We could cite the devaluation of traditional experiences neoliberalism promotes, the process of individualization endangering collective bonds, and the imperatives of flexibility, mobility, and risktaking that threaten family values and personal affiliations: neoliberalism as "practical antihumanism."

While these forms of critique correctly point out some important effects of neoliberal government, they are at the same time characterized by serious limits and shortcomings. The main problem is that they undertake a critique of neoliberalism by relying on the very concepts they intend to criticize. They operate by opposing knowledge to power, state to economy, subject to repression, and we may well ask what role these dualisms play in constituting and stabilizing liberal-capitalist societies. I think the critical contribution of the concept of governmentality for the study of neoliberal governmentality lies exactly in "bridging" these dualisms, trying to analyze them on a "plane of immanence." By coupling forms of knowledge, strategies of power, and technologies of the self, it allows for a more comprehensive account of the current political and social transformations since it makes visible the depth and breath of processes of domination and exploitation. Let's elaborate on this point a bit by turning to each criticism in more detail.

Rationality and Reality

The first important aspect of the concept of governmentality is that it does not juxtapose politics and knowledge, but articulates a "political knowledge" (Foucault 1997b, 67). Foucault does not pose the question of the relation between practices

and rationalities, their correspondence or noncorrespondence in the sense of a deviation or shortening of reason. His "main problem" is not to investigate if practices conform to rationalities "but to discover which kind of rationality they are using" (1981, 226). The analytics of government not only concentrates on the mechanisms of the legitimization of domination or the masking of violence, but focuses on the knowledge that is part of the practices, the systematization and "rationalization" of a pragmatics of guidance. In this perspective, rationality refers not to a transcendental reason but to historical practices; it does not imply a normative judgment since it refers to social relations. Foucault makes this point very clear:

> I don't believe one can speak of an intrinsic notion of "rationalization" without on the one hand positing an absolute value inherent in reason, and on the other taking the risk of applying the term empirically in a completely arbitrary way. I think one must restrict one's use of this word to an instrumental and relative meaning. The ceremony of public torture isn't in itself more irrational than imprisonment in a cell; but it's irrational in terms of a type of penal practice which involves new ways of calculating its utility, justifying it, graduating it, etc. One isn't assessing things in terms of an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect forms of rationality, but rather examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them, because it's true that "practices" don't exist without a certain regime of rationality. (Foucault 1991b, 79)

In this perspective, a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge that simply "represents" the governed reality. It is not an exterior instance, but an element of government itself which helps to create a discursive field in which exercising power is "rational." The concept of governmentality suggests that it is important to see not only whether neoliberal rationality is an adequate representation of society but also how it functions as a "politics of truth," producing new forms of knowledge, inventing different notions and concepts that contribute to the "government" of new domains of regulation and intervention.[4]

The discourse on "sustainable development" might serve as an example to illustrate this point. One important aspect of the "new world order" is the reconceptualization of external nature in terms of an "ecosystem." Nature, which once meant an

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4. Foucault introduced the notion of problematization in order to more strongly delimit the methodological procedure of "historical nominalism" and "nominalist critique" (Foucault 1991b, 86) in his studies from realistic conceptions, on the one hand, and relativistic positions, on the other.

> When I say that I am studying the 'problematization' of madness, crime, or sexuality, it is not a way of denying the reality of such phenomena. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation at a given moment. The question I raise is this one: How and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analysed, and treated as, for example, 'mental illness'? What are the elements which are relevant for a given 'problematization'? And even if I won't say that what is characterized as 'schizophrenia' corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an 'answer' to a concrete situation which is real. (Foucault 1985b, 115; cf. Lemke 1997, 327–46)

independent space clearly demarcated from the social with an independent power to act and regulated by autonomous laws, is increasingly becoming the "environment" of the capitalist system. The ecosystem conception is also a reinvention of the boundaries between nature and society. In view of today's "global" perils, the main issue now is less the restrictive notion of the "limits of growth" than it is a dynamic growth of limits. In an age of "sustainable development," previously untapped areas are being opened in the interests of capitalization and chances for commercial exploitation. Nature and life itself are being drawn into the economic discourse of efficient resource management.

> No longer is nature defined and treated as an external, exploitable domain. Through a new process of capitalization, effected primarily by a shift in representation, previously "uncapitalized" aspects of nature and society become internal to capital . . . This transformation is perhaps most visible in discussions of rainforest biodiversity: the key to the survival of the rainforest is seen as lying in the genes of the species, the usefulness of which could be released for profit through genetic engineering and biotechnology in the production of commercially valuable products, such as pharmaceuticals. Capital thus develops a conversationalist tendency, significantly different from its usual reckless, destructive form. (Escobar 1996, 47; compare Eblinghaus and Stickler 1996; see also Darier 1999)

Furthermore, the concept of governmentality helps to pinpoint the strategic character of government. To differentiate between rationalities and technologies of government does not mark the clash of program and reality, the confrontation of the world of discourse with the field of practices. The relations between rationalities and technologies, programs and institutions are much more complex than a simple application or transfer. The difference between the envisioned aims of a program and its actual effects does not refer to the purity of the program and the impurity of reality, but to different realities and heterogenous strategies. History is not the achievement of a plan but what lies "in between" these levels. Thus, Foucault sees rationalities as part of a reality that is characterized by the permanent "failure" of programs.

Again, let me refer to an example that Foucault himself provided in *Discipline and Punish*: the failure of the prison system, which produced delinquency as an unintended effect. In his genealogy of the prison, Foucault does not confront reality with intention, nor does he frame the problem in terms of functionality or adequacy. The institutionalization of the prison in the nineteenth century produced

> an entirely unforeseen effect which had nothing to do with any kind of strategic ruse on the part of some meta- or trans-historic subject conceiving and willing it. This effect was the constitution of a delinquent milieu . . . The prison operated as a process of filtering, concentrating, professionalising and circumscribing a criminal milieu. From about the 1830s onward, one finds an immediate re-utilisation of this unintended, negative effect within a new strategy which came in some sense to occupy this empty space, or transform the negative into a positive. The delinquent milieu came to be re-utilised for diverse political and economic ends, such as the extraction of profit from pleasure through the organisation of prostitution. This is what I call the strategic completion (remplissement) of the apparatus. (Foucault 1980, 195–6)

By reconstructing this "strategic dimension it is also possible to take more into account the conflicts and resistances that are put forward against technologies and rationalities of government. Struggles and fights do not only take place in an interval "between" programs and their "realization"; they are not limited to some kind of "negative energy" or obstructive capacity. Rather than "distorting" the "original" program, they are actually always already part of the programs themselves, actively contributing to "compromises," "fissures," and "incoherencies" inside them. Thus, the analysis of governmentality does not only take into account "breaks" or "gaps" between program and technology but also inside each of them, viewing them not as signs of their failure but as the very condition of their existence (see Malpas and Wickham 1995; O'Malley, Weir, and Shearing 1997; Lemke 2000).

Indeed, we need to refrain from a "rationalist conception of rationality." Neoliberal practices are not necessarily instable or in crisis when they rely on increasing social cleavages or relate to an incoherent political program. Neoliberalism might work not instead of social exclusion and marginalization processes or political "deficiencies"; on the contrary, relinquishing social securities and political rights might well prove to be its raison d'être.

Economy and Politics

The concept of governmentality also proves to be useful in correcting the diagnosis of neoliberalism as an expansion of economy in politics, which takes for granted the separation of state and market. The argument goes that there is some "pure" or "anarchic" economy that will be "regulated" or "civilized" by a political reaction of society. But as we have known since Marx, there is no market independent of the state, and economy is always political economy. The problem with this kind of critique is that it shares the (neo-)liberal program of a separation between politics and economy. The perspective of governmentality makes possible the development of a dynamic form of analysis that does not limit itself to stating the "retreat of politics" or the "domination of the market," but deciphers the so-called end of politics itself as a political program.

In his work, Foucault shows that the "art of government" is not limited to the field of politics as separated from the economy. Instead, the constitution of a conceptually and practically distinguished space, governed by autonomous laws and a proper rationality, is itself an element of "economic" government.[5] Already in his work on

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5. As Foucault writes:

Quesnay speaks of good government as 'economic government'. This latter notion becomes tautological, given that the art of government is just the art of exercising power in the form and according to the model of the economy. But the reason why Quesnay speaks of 'economic government' is that the word 'economy' . . . is in the process of acquiring a modern meaning, and it is at this moment becoming apparent that the very essence of government—that is, the art of exercising power in the form of the economy—is to have as its main objective that which we are today accustomed to call 'the economy'. (Foucault 1991a, 92, 99–101; see Meuret 1993; Miller and Rose 1990)

discipline Foucault repeatedly pointed out that the power of the economy was vested on a prior "economics of power" since the accumulation of capital presumes technologies of production and forms of labor that enable putting to use a multitude of human beings in an economically profitable manner. Foucault showed that labor-power must first be constituted before it can be exploited: that is, that life time must be synthesized into labor time, individuals must be subjugated to the production circle, habits must be formed, and time and space must be organized according to a scheme. Thus, economic exploitation required a prior "political investment of the body" (1977, 25). By this theoretical reorientation, Foucault hoped to complement and enlarge Marx's critique of political economy with a "critique of political anatomy."[6]

In his studies on governmentality and his courses at the Collège de France on neoliberal reason, Foucault takes this form of analysis one step further, combining the "microphysics of power" with the macropolitical question of the state. Again, he does not limit the field of power relations to the government of the state; on the contrary, what Foucault is interested in is the question how power relations historically could concentrate in the form of the state without ever being reducible to it. Following this line of inquiry, Foucault sees the state as "nothing more that the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentality . . . It is necessary to address from an exterior point of view the question of the state, it is necessary to analyse the problem of the state by referring to the practices of government" (1984, 21). When Foucault speaks of the "governmentalization of the state" (1991a, 103), he does not assume that government is a technique that could be applied or used by state authorities or apparatus; instead he comprehends the state itself as a tactics of government, as a dynamic form and historic stabilization of societal power relations. Thus, governmentality is "at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality" (103).

Foucault's discussion of neoliberal governmentality shows that the so-called retreat of the state is in fact a prolongation of government: neoliberalism is not the end but a transformation of politics that restructures the power relations in society. What we observe today is not a diminishment or reduction of state sovereignty and planning capacities but a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government (e.g., nongovernmental organizations) that indicate fundamental transformations in statehood and a new relation between state and civil society actors. This encompasses, on the one hand, the displacement of forms of practices that were formerly defined in terms of

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6. Elsewhere I have tried to sketch some implications of this theoretical encounter between Foucault and Marx for organizational theory (Lemke 1999). A more elaborated approach of "a critique of the political economy of organization" combining a historical materialist and a genealogical perspective is elaborated in Türk, Lemke, and Bruch 2002 (see also Türk 1999; Bruch 1999).

nation-state to supranational levels and, on the other hand, the development of forms of subpolitics "beneath" politics in its traditional meaning. In other words, the difference between state and society, politics and economy does not function as a foundation or a borderline but as element and effect of specific neoliberal technologies of government.

Domination and Technologies of the Self

While many forms of contemporary critique still rely on the dualism of freedom and constraint, consensus and violence, from the perspective of governmentality the polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible: government refers to a continuum, which extends from political government right through to forms of self-regulation—namely, "technologies of the self."

This theoretical stance allows for a more complex analysis of neoliberal forms of government that feature not only direct intervention by means of empowered and specialized state apparatuses, but also characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals. The strategy of rendering individual subjects "responsible" (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, and so forth, and for life in society, into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of "self-care." One key feature of the neoliberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. As the choice of options for action is—or so the neoliberal notion of rationality would have it—the expression of free will on the basis of a self-determined decision, the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them. This strategy can be deployed in all sorts of areas and leads to areas of social responsibility becoming a matter of personal provisions (Rose and Miller 1992; Garland 1996, 452–5; Rose 1996, 50–62; O'Malley 1996, 199–204).

The point is that it is not sufficient to focus on the destruction of forms of identity without taking into account the production of new modes of subjectivity linked to governmental technologies. A number of studies have elaborated on various aspects of the transformation in "technologies of the self." I wish to briefly touch on one of them. In her study of the "self-esteem" movements in the United States, Barbara Cruikshank shows how the borders between the private and the public are redrawn in the neoliberal model of rationality. The "self-esteem" approach considers a wide variety of social problems to have their source in a lack of self-esteem on the part of the persons concerned. Cruikshank analyzes the corresponding government programs in California launched on the basis of this assumption and ascertains that their implementation involved more than just replacing the political by the personal and collective action by personal dedication. The "self-esteem" movement, Cruikshank sug-

gests, is not limited to the personal domain as its goal is a new politics and a new social order. It promises to solve social problems by heralding a revolution—not against capitalism, racism, the patriarchy, and so on, but against the (wrong) way of governing ourselves. In this way, the angle of possible political and social intervention changes. It is not social-structural factors that decide whether unemployment, alcoholism, criminality, child abuse, and so forth can be solved, but individual-subjective categories. "Self-esteem" thus has much more to do with self-assessment than with self-respect as the self continuously has to be measured, judged, and disciplined in order to gear personal "empowerment" to collective yardsticks. In this manner, a forever precarious harmony (and one which therefore constantly has to be reassessed) has to be forged between the political goals of the state and a personal "state of esteem" (Cruikshank 1999; see also Nettleton 1997, Greco 1998, Valverde 1998).

Conclusion: Governmentality, Marxism and Truth Politics

To summarize, the concept of governmentality construes neoliberalism not just as ideological rhetoric, as a political-economic reality, or as a practical antihumanism, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists. The analysis of governmentality reminds us that political economy relies on a political anatomy of the body. We can decipher a neoliberal governmentality in which not only the individual body but also collective bodies and institutions (public administrations, universities, etc.), corporations, and states have to be "lean," "fit," "flexible," and "autonomous." The governmentality approach also focuses on the integral link between micro- and macropolitical levels (e.g., globalization or competition for "attractive" sites for companies and personal imperatives as regards beauty or a regimented diet). Moreover, it highlights the intimate relationship between "ideological" and "political-economic" agencies (e.g., the semantics of flexibility and the introduction of new structures of production). This enables us to shed sharper light on the effects neoliberal governmentality has in terms of (self-)regulation and domination. These effects entail not just the simple reproduction of existing social asymmetries or their ideological obfuscation, but are the product of a recoding of social mechanisms of exploitation and domination on the basis of a new topography of the social.

Foucault's analytics of government offers a theoretical and critical perspective that parallels very similar endeavors and recent developments in Marxist theory. Let me just name a few. First, the concept of governmentality could be linked to those theories of the state that work in a neo-Gramscian tradition, making use of the notion of hegemony while displacing the political distinction between state and civil society (Jessop 1990; Demirovic 1997). Second, there are some striking parallels between Foucault's work on discipline and the technologies of the self and Althusser's remarks on the process of interpellation, the concept of ideology, and the formation of subjectivity (Montag 1995; Butler 1997). Third, Foucault's notion of biopower as

the government of living beings has been taken up by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their investigation of the material functioning of "Empire." They rightly claim that Foucault's work not only helps us to understand the "historical, epochal passage in social forms from *disciplinary society* to the *society of control*" but that Foucault also "allows us to recognize the biopolitical nature of the new paradigm of power" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 22–3, emphasis in original; Deleuze 1990). Finally, Foucault's concept of economy as a governmental practice is very close to those that work in the direction of a "decentring of the economy" and a "postmodern materialism" (Milberg 1991; Gibson-Graham 1996; Callari and Ruccio 1996).

Let me conclude by pointing out very briefly the self-critical capacity of such a form of analysis. By situating the processes of theory construction and the invention of concepts in a sociohistorical space, the concept of governmentality allows us to problematize their truth-effects. It thus becomes possible to account for the performative character of theorizing, which could be comprehended as a form of "truth politics." This "strategic" conception of theory should prevent us from a very serious flaw that dominates much contemporary critique: the "essentialization of the critique of essentialism." What do I mean by this? When social and political scientists increasingly claim the importance of categories like "invention," "fiction," and "construction" for their work, they often double the theoretical attitude they initially set out to criticize: they hold that the "poststructuralist" or "antiessentialist" stance they adopt does signal a "right" or "true" knowledge. As a consequence, they in fact take up the theoretical position Foucault once criticized as "juridico-political discourse" (Foucault 1979, 88; see also Rouse 1993 on "epistemic souvereignty") since it lacks any sense of the materiality of the process of theory production.

In the perspective of governmentality, we are always obliged to reflect on the historical and social conditions that rendered a certain historical knowledge of society "real," taking into account the possible theoretical and nontheoretical consequences of these "truths." We should distinguish attentively between denaturalization and dematerialization. And again, this is more than a methodological or theoretical imperative. Today we find a strange parallelism between the practical interventions of genomic analysis and biotechnological engineering, on the one hand, and the theoretical appraisal of constructivism, on the other. In fact, the increasing scientific recognition of "antiessentialist" thought and the theoretical distance from "naturalized" identities may be in disturbing harmony with a political rationality that tries to incorporate the last residuals of "nature" in the flexible paradise of neoliberalism— only to renaturalize this very form of society as some naturally given.

This paper was first presented at the RETHINKING MARXISM *conference held at the University of Amherst, Massachusetts at 21–4 September 2000. Some sections contain revised versions of previously published material (see Lemke 2001). I am indebted to Warren Montag, Carlos Novas, Jack Amariglio, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments and criticism on earlier versions of this paper. The errors that might remain are of course mine.*

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