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## **Making Governmentality I: An Interview with Peter Miller by Alan McKinlay**

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**Alan McKinlay (AM):** Today I'd like to discuss the development of 'governmentality' as a concept over some thirty years and more: the career of a concept from its birth in Foucault's lectures through an early phase of conceptual experimentation, innovation and application to what we might call today's mature state where some of the main terms are widely used across many disciplines. But let's start with a sense of where you started your own academic career and how that became entangled with Foucault and governmentality.

**Peter Miller (PM):** I was reflecting back on this the other day and I realised that the bits and pieces that ended up as 'governmentality' started off in the early 1980s when Nik Rose and I separately were moving in a similar direction. There was my doctoral thesis which I published in 1987 as *Domination and Power*, which was a broad social science discussion of power, but with a focus on subjectivity and subjectification: to put it crudely, why the Frankfurt School got it wrong about subjectivity; why Lukacs got it wrong about subjectivity. Basically, it started out as quite a theoretical piece of work, but as I got more into counterposing Foucault's approach to subjectivity with the Frankfurt School and so on, the more I realised that I had to read Foucault's histories. Governmentality didn't exist at that time. We were in the aftermath of structural Marxism – of relative autonomy, of ideological state apparatuses – but to understand Foucault you had to read his histories, particularly *Birth of the Clinic* and *Histoire de la Folie*. You had to use the French original for the latter because the English translation was so abridged and virtually without references. For me, that was revelatory. All of a sudden, you realised that you had to read the history of medicine and the history of psychiatry to *really* appreciate Foucault. I had been encouraged in this direction a little earlier, when Colin Gordon kindly encouraged me to write an extended review of Robert Castel's *L'Ordre Psychiatrique*, which was published in the journal *I&C* in 1980 (previously *Ideology & Consciousness*). I subsequently went on to write a similar review article on Castel's book *La Société Psychiatrique Avancée*, which he co-authored with his wife Françoise Castel and Ann Lovell. At around the same time, I was invited to join the editorial collective of *I&C*, which provided me with an important intellectual community, one that was more or less non-existent in conventional academic circles at that time. This emerging focus on history, or histories, was very significant for me, for I was moving from a set of debates that were dominated by very abstract arguments about structuralisms in all their different forms, to pretending to being a historian. Then realising that what you had to do was *histories*.

That was when and how Nik Rose and I hooked up. Actually, we ended up teaching a quite quirky set of seminars under the University of London external programme. He had always had an interest in applied psychology and psychiatry, and his book *The Psychological Complex* was an important reference point, as was his earlier piece on the ‘psychological complex’ that he published in *Ideology and Consciousness* in 1979. Somehow we had the idea that it would be good to put on a series of seminars that we thought might attract something like five people. Instead the room was packed. This involved us in an encounter with radical psychiatry that paralleled Foucault’s interests. So, I was exiting from a heavily theorised post-Marxist intellectual tradition, then reading these local histories, and radical ‘psy’ practitioners. All of this was being put together bit by bit. Nik had already published his first book, *The Psychological Complex* which was a history of applied psychology, which was I think one of the very early studies written in English that examined the links between expertise and the administration of conduct in a (loosely) Foucauldian manner. I was dabbling with bits of the history of psychiatry: the psychiatrisation of unemployment and so on. We started picking things up and putting them together – it was completely opportunist and unsystematic. *The Power of Psychiatry*, which we published in 1986, was an early outcome of this collaboration. We then did some work on the history of the Tavistock in *Sociology*, other pieces on the Tavistock appeared in other journals. In the introduction to *Governing the Present* we look back on that process as a somewhat sporadic examination of little histories, that we now recognise or label as laboratories of governmentality. Of course, we didn’t call it governmentality at the time. So it was all very uncoordinated, unplanned, unsystematic: in fact, that was the beauty of it. It was around this time that I met up with Ted O’Leary and we presented our ‘Governable Person’ paper in 1984 at a conference held in Madison, Wisconsin, organised by Anthony Hopwood under the auspices of *Accounting, Organizations and Society*. So, there was this funny sort of temporality with very different things going on in parallel in different settings, in different disciplines, and at the margins of disciplines. At this point, I was just starting to dabble in the history of accounting but still doing these little histories of psychology/psychiatry. And Nik was coming more from a kind of applied psychology. We started to realise that there was something in common between things that looked completely different from a more conventional disciplinary perspective. This was a gradual process. Don’t forget, I was also trying to get a job and trying to explain a curriculum vitae that included a book on Foucault and critical theory, studies of the history of psychiatry and psychology and then starting to do studies of accounting as well.

**AM:** Why accounting? How did that come about?

**PM:** I was exiting from a broadly structuralist Marxism, there were some big problems facing Marxism about economic calculation. The set of people that were relevant to me as I finished my doctorate were Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess who, with Tony Cutler, put together *Marx’s Capital and Capitalism Today*; Jim Tomlinson who was talking about the importance of understanding different forms of economic calculation; Graeme Thompson whose work on the nature of the firm, economic policy, calculation and rhetoric was very important for me. At this point, the focus was not specifically to do with accounting, but about a variety of forms of economic calculation and how these were done and how they produced effects –

what many now call performativity. A lot of that impetus came from that group of people and especially from *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*. We have to look at forms of economic calculation and their impact, or their variable impacts, and their constitutive powers. This offered a way of moving beyond Marxism's struggle to move from value to something observable such as price or accounting numbers. Actually, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* does have a chapter about accounting.

I had been struggling within this structuralist Marxist framework to understand something called 'ideology' and ended up worrying, like many others, that the notion of 'relative autonomy' was a bit of a cop-out. So worries about that sort of dimension; worries about economic calculation. This was a genuine insight: all of a sudden, we realised that we need to look at particular forms of economic calculation and what they do and what effects they produce. And then completely out-of-the-blue (for me), but not really, of course, as networks are real: I was contacted by Anthony Hopwood, who at that time was working with Stuart Burchell (the brother of Graham, who I was then working with on *I&C*). Anthony and Stuart were working on a long-running project, which was to give rise to the famous Burchell et al paper on the roles of accounting. Anthony was at London Business School at that point. He asked me to teach a doctoral course on theory and methodology. Anthony insisted that this should not start with Aristotle and just about get up to the eighteenth century, but should start with relevant materials about things that are interesting *now*. Before I knew it I was teaching *Discipline and Punish* and *The Order of Things* at London Business School, along with Paul Feyerabend and Ian Hacking. And in a crazy way it worked, partly because it was so off-the-wall, but also because it forced the students to really question what they would otherwise have treated as purely technical. Ted O'Leary was visiting LBS that year – 1982 and 1983; and Anne Loft was working on her PhD with Anthony as well, and this helped provide a mini-community. And Anthony suggested that Ted (O'Leary) and I write a paper together. Anthony just had this brilliant way of spotting possible pairings: it didn't always work, but it often *did* work. And that was the start of the 'Governable Person' paper.

The move into accounting was not as weird as it looked because of those worries – that had been going on for many years by that point – about how do we analyse forms of economic calculation and what they do, from a radical left position? That worry – that question – predated a concern about accounting *per se*. But accounting, in that sense, was a natural fit. It seemed to me a very natural move from the history of psychiatry to the history of accounting. I don't know that that trajectory would be so likely today. I was effectively an unemployed sociologist doing bits and pieces that were interesting to me, and a few things with Nik. But governmentality didn't exist at this time: we just had several studies of different things. We were not even trying to be Foucault scholars. One lovely little story is that we had written a paper about the Tavistock for *Sociology*. The reviewers' feedback was that they liked the empirics, liked the paper, but that the theoretical framing was low-key and did we know that there was this guy called Michel Foucault whose work would be very useful to us. So, we were not banner-waving Foucauldians. For people who had spent a lot of time worrying about how to make structural Marxism work in a way that didn't rely on

get-out clauses, part of the liberation was that you studied things simply because they were interesting. Now, there were certain themes such as how subjects were made up, and so on, but without any theoretical shackles. It wasn't naïve empiricism but it wasn't very structured theoretically.

**AM:** You have had an interest in accounting as a technology, as a technology that *does* things. Conventional accounting thinks of itself as a technology that reports. Now, that all makes sense. You explain that you came from an intellectual milieu – structural Marxism – that was running out of steam, and that its increasingly abstract nature did not allow it to easily ask relevant questions about contemporary capitalism. But there were other theoretical alternatives: Gramsci; or ‘history from below.’ So, by choosing to make concepts stimulated by Foucault involved not choosing, say, Gramsci.

**PM:** You're quite right. We acknowledge this in *Governing the Present*. We were reading Gramsci. The appeal of Gramsci was that he offered a less constrained way of framing questions: you did not have to worry so much about ‘relative autonomy’ and other get-out clauses. Gramsci was always seen as a sort of fellow-traveller. But the importance of Foucault's histories was that they allowed or encouraged a framing in terms of subjectivity, the formation and enabling of certain subjectivities. That was the absolute punch-line for me: that the appeal to subjectivity is so central to Foucault's histories. Now, of course, those themes *are* in Gramsci but they are *absolutely* in the foreground of Foucault. And that provided the most obvious hook with the accounting, because if you approach these issues via management accounting, not financial reporting, then the minute you see Taylorism and standard costing from a Foucauldian perspective, it provides such a perfect example of acting or managing at a distance, acting on the actions of others, managing the conduct of conduct. It just seemed such a clear illustration of how devices like that make up people, constrain the possibilities for personhood. It was just such an ideal fit. You could not get there by hanging onto structural Marxism, because of all the problems with Althusser and caveats like ‘relative autonomy.’ That said, Althusser did prompt us to look to subjectivity but – for me – that was where you hit a brick wall because that didn't really help understand how subjects got made up, and what does that making up. Nik had previously done various studies in psychology and education, and we started doing work on various forms of Tavistock interventions: industrial psychology, the psychotherapy of unemployment, the family. And you then start seeing all these very different sites. ‘The voices of the underdog’ approach was not really where we were coming from. Rediscovering the voices of the dispossessed was *not* the register we were using, although framed in a rather different way that question is absolutely central to Foucault's analyses, particularly his lovely piece ‘The Life of Infamous Men’. Like Foucault, we *were* interested in how peoples' lives are interfered with, what happens when their lives clash with power, with administrative apparatuses. But we start from forms of intervention, forms of power, and then explore how these operate in quite low-level settings, how life and lives come to be administered. But it was never a matter of recapturing real voices, it was more a question of trying to examine *how* are those voices framed and

articulated through relations of power that also constrain them, even if the constraint is at times an injunction to ‘liberate’ oneself.

**AM:** So it was almost about those devices that provided the vocabulary for living?

**PM:** Yes, exactly. There are quite serious misconceptions in many of the readings of Foucault and Foucauldian type writings, many of which want to reinstall ‘real’ subjectivity. What this misses is that Foucault was interested in ways of making people (up), giving them certain capacities to act. There’s a very nice phrase of Foucault’s in the second Afterword to Dreyfus and Rabinow’s *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, published in 1983 (‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’) where he says that devices such as these forms of intervention are not necessarily bad in and of themselves, but that everything is dangerous. This points us to the operationalisation of these devices, a sort of contextualising if you like, but not from a presumption that forms of autonomy are necessarily evil; nor that forms of autonomising are necessarily positive or liberating either. Nik expresses this in the title of one of his books, *Powers of Freedom*. That idea – coming from Foucault – that we borrowed, was that freedom can be a form of the exercise of power. In fact it has become a key form for the exercise of power in the past few decades.

**AM:** One of the curious aspects of the way your work became entangled with governmentality is that, initially at least, Foucault provided you with a general sensibility, new ways of looking at things, an open approach rather than a theory whose conclusions are written before any historical or empirical work begins. Althusserian Marxism cranks out certain, almost pre-determined results. Foucault, at that juncture, provided you with new concepts that were looser – much looser - in terms of what could be examined and the connections that could be made between quite different institutions or quite different forms of expertise.

**PM:** That’s absolutely the case. Foucault’s lecture on governmentality was published in *I&C* in 1979, long before it got any wider currency. That essay was republished over a decade later, in 1991, in *The Foucault Effect*, around the time that Nik and I published our papers in *Economy and Society*, and in the *British Journal of Sociology*. If you had wanted a clear or structured theoretical framing to reassure you, then it just did not exist in 1980. When I started trying to think in terms of modes of governing in the early 1980s, governmentality didn’t really exist. Even if you look at Foucault’s lecture on governmentality there’s not a huge amount in there. Colin Gordon’s ‘Afterword’ to *Power/Knowledge*, published in 1980 helped a lot. And Jacques Donzelot’s *The Policing of Families* was published in French in 1977, and was translated into English only a few years later. There were gentle hints at something like governmentality in *Histoire de la Folie*, and in Foucault’s essay on public health in the eighteenth century. In the latter, Foucault sketched out a notion of power as ‘productive’, one based on the notion of population and its health, and the various devices for administering and seeking to increase its utility, and which go ‘beyond the state’. He also outlined similar ideas in the later parts of *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, which was

first published in French in 1976, and translated into English just a couple of years later. In doing empirical or historical studies in the early 1980s, what we were doing was thinking about varying forms of expertise, and how they framed the ways that people lived their lives. For me, it was only after a decade or so of empirical/historical work that I started to think about the categories that were useful for getting on with it. In a rather different analytic direction, Latour's *Science in Action* was published in 1987, and this provided some ideas that seemed complementary, such as action at a distance, centres of calculation, immutable and combinable mobiles, and so on. And in yet another direction, one that has been important to me for several decades, Ian Hacking published *Representing and Intervening* in 1983, and *The Taming of Chance* in 1990. Hacking's historico-philosophical writings have been a source of great inspiration.

**AM:** Perhaps with governmentality Foucault is having another attempt to cut off the king's head. Discipline can be too easily read as a form of social control. There are too many forms of government to be captured under the single term, discipline. Governing means something more, something else. Clearly, governing means something different when we are talking about families from when we are talking about asylums. However, there are moments when one can see those sorts of connections. Cultural Marxism's greatest insight was that capitalism was remaking itself before our very eyes. Jimmy Airlie, a former leader of the 1971-72 UCS work-in and national union organiser, credited Ford Motor Company with enough intelligence to recognise that you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. Management was being rethought at the same time as government was being reimagined. Management was now a cultural form – a language and set of practices - that cannot be reduced to a logic of capital.

**PM:** And this is why all these peculiar connections, which led me to where I am now, are so important. Robert Castel's histories of psychiatry were very important, as I have already indicated: his first book, *L'Ordre Psychiatrique* was a sort of follow on (historically, and in terms of its mode of analysis) to *Histoire de la Folie*. Jacques Donzelot's writing on the family, which I have also mentioned already, was also important. And Castel's subsequent book, *La Société Psychiatrique Avancée*, was a sort of history of the present, in so far as it examined what might be called 'libertarian' psychotherapies in the USA. Those were people writing in the penumbra of Foucault, and also no doubt inspiring Foucault. So it was quite a mixture of writings, and not at all a fine-tuned theoretical apparatus. We drew on this range of literatures not because we thought we could combine them into 'a theory' but because they seemed helpful ways of doing things, and also because they appeared to share a sort of family resemblance despite the differences in the domains they examined. And it was those things that got brought into management in various different forms by a wide range of people. Again, it was getting a handle on how techniques that claimed to liberate people could be viewed as a form of power, just as much as those that confined and constrained. Much of the Foucauldian writings up to that point had focused on the 'psy' disciplines but had not

engaged with the economic world or with management. But it became so obvious that there was a route into management for all of these devices. And, of course, it was obvious to us because we had studied the Tavistock which has both pillars, management and organisation on the one hand, and the family on the other. And so it was incredibly important to see how those devices were re-framing management, what it did, how it did what it did, and how it articulated discursively what it was trying to do. This was a management that was at odds with the Taylorised factory and speeded up production lines. Part of the appeal – and part of the success of this research – was what was happening at the time. The other thing was that we were moving into a period in which the state was being questioned, markets and quasi-markets were being celebrated, and notions of choice trumpeted for the social sphere, and public life more generally.

AM: There was an incoherence in Thatcherism. It was absolutely not a fully-fledged neoliberal project. Far from it: initially, Thatcherism was little more than a list of things that the Tories were against. Neoliberalism gained shape over the first decade of Thatcherism. In parallel with your work on governmentality, neoliberalism was gaining a shape – not just instincts hostile to the state – that the state should be used proactively to construct different kinds of market inside the state and beyond the state.

PM: That's absolutely correct. Nik Rose and I already suggested that rough chronology and lack of coherence in 'Political Power Beyond the State', even though at the time of writing the thing that is now called neoliberalism by so many was still taking shape, and even though we subsequently used the term advanced liberalism. I have written about the limits of the term neoliberalism more recently with two colleagues of mine at LSE, Liisa Kurunmäki and Andrea Mennicken, in a piece forthcoming in *Sociologie du Travail*. Patrick Joyce also comments very helpfully on these issues in a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology*, published in 2010. That the thing called 'neoliberalism' has feeder roots from the left. Demands for transparency and accountability were not unique to neoliberalism. The power of the medical profession, their unwillingness to be open was criticised from many quarters, including the left. More generally, a suspicion of the state: all of this was a broad current on the left. Ironically, calls for autonomy – also from the left – ended up becoming part of what is now called neoliberalism. The culture of transparency and accountability that is central to neoliberalism was not the case in the 1970s: indeed, it was the other way around. Transparency and accountability have become appropriated, annexed by neoliberalism, with the latter given greater solidity in the writings of analysts and commentators than it deserves. In terms of our practice, what we chose to study, we did not have a checklist for neoliberalism. We just studied things that seemed important and relevant at that moment, which seemed relatively open-ended about where it would all end up.

AM: Just as you say, through the 1980s there were numerous attempts to develop theoretical languages that could come to terms with the new management and the turn to flexibility.



Was this flexible Fordism or flexible specialisation or something else besides? There were two strands to this. First, how to work with the grain of flexibility to produce more skilled, better jobs. Second, to lament the passing of a world of mass production in which inherited assumptions about the nature of management and work organisation were becoming increasingly irrelevant. Both, of course, were about preserving *something* of the past.

**PM:** Again, we now live in a world in which everyone is quantified; in which everyone can be benchmarked against everyone else in six different ways; and in which everyone can quantify themselves. But some of those demands for quantification and comparability came from more democratising ambitions that became part of the bandwagon of neoliberalism. One of the reasons we do the sort of research that we do is to not forget that things can end up going in quite different, unexpected directions, sometimes over a relatively short time span.

**AM:** That takes us on to the thorny question of the state. Perhaps the thing that has created the most controversy about your work which is that your version of governmentality goes too far. That is to say, it's one thing to say that the state does not exhaust politics and, as you have quite rightly insisted, that new ways of governing have become the ways that all sorts of institutions operate, and that this was not initiated or prompted by the state. The state is not unique, it's certainly not sheltered from these new ways of managing. But at the same time, to look at political power beyond the state suggests that the state continues to play an important role, not least as a vehicle for neoliberal ideas and practices.

**PM:** It is a headache. We have always said, quite unambiguously, that focusing on political power beyond the state is not to say that the state does not exist, or that the state is not important. But that is certainly how it has been interpreted by many. All we were trying to say was that there is a huge amount that happens, and that pertains to power, outside and beyond those domains. Much of what we were interested in were interventions in domains that were officially or formally private or personal: *that* was our starting point. Again, if you traced back the affiliations and how these unfold then you do not always end up back at the state. It would be valuable to trace how the linkages and connections that produce effects that *are* beyond the state are mobilised around the state; or, give the state a role in articulating the desirability of those effects. Jacques Donzelot wrote in *L'Invention du Social* (1984) about the transformation of the state into an animator, a mobilising force, rather than a provider. From that perspective, the state ceases to be the starting point and the end point, but it remains important. I do think in relation to the question what is neoliberalism, it would be very interesting to reflect on how these connections get established between the state and things that are certainly beyond the state. So, that's something that we haven't done, or haven't done to a great extent. But, on the other hand, we did ask what forms of intervention were taking place; how are they being articulated; how is it being organised, and to what ends. Much of what we were looking at just did not *originate* from the state. So, that has

been a bit of a problem, in just the same way that people still want to hang onto a notion of there being an essential human asset called subjectivity, rather than accepting that subjectivities are made up within and through a whole range of devices and their associated rationales. The same holds true for ‘the state’: some people seem offended if you argue that this other stuff matters, and may even come to matter more than the state. Don’t forget that before we formulated the notion of political power beyond the state we were simply doing studies of this, that and the other. When we started to frame what we were doing in our various studies, only then did we realise that much of what we had been studying had not been coming from, or was not directly related to or derived from something called the state. Now, some people found that very difficult to accept.

**AM:** Of course, there is a more primitive refusal to attribute everything to Thatcher: that’s just too easy. In that sense, what the notion of political power beyond the state offered was a way to cut off the queen’s head.

**PM:** I’ve always found Deleuze’s notion of assemblage very helpful here as it doesn’t require coherence. An assemblage is the putting together of a lot of disparate elements, sometimes complementary, sometimes weakly aligned, and sometimes even contradictory, but assembled together and stabilised for long enough to operate and do something. Ted O’Leary and I wrote about a factory modernisation programme in the US in these terms in a paper called ‘The Factory as Laboratory’. I think it is a helpful way of understanding neoliberalism, if one wishes to use the term: it’s absolutely not a coherent thing and its not always a useful way of describing what is happening in very different settings, because the term obliterates these differences and the internal contradictions. And what we were looking at was not coherent but there were still connections and affiliations, and of course ‘contagions’ as Deleuze remarks.

Initially, when we started trying to frame our empirical work we talked about ‘rationalities’, ‘programmes’ and ‘technologies.’ ‘Programmes’ was a category that allowed us to address something rather more empirical than you find in the writings of political philosophers, something more localised, including what you might call low-level or relatively local projects which might be sector-specific or industry-specific. ‘Technologies’ was about the devices that were formed around these programmes, and which help make them operable, and help allow forms of intervening. ‘Rationalities’ was supposed to allow us to engage with political theory but it was largely edited out in some of the re-workings of our arguments by others. Colin Gordon, whose writings have influenced me a lot, speaks to these issues very helpfully in the ‘Afterword’ to *Power/Knowledge*. What we were trying to do was tease out whether there were things in common, that were useful, across the different sites we had been studying. We ended up by saying that these things seem to have some sort of family resemblance, but they are not the same but they can work jointly or in the same direction. So ‘governmentality’ came relatively late to the game, even if the notion of administering or

governing lives was already there in our previous studies. For me, what was at issue was an insistence on the pairing of certain devices with particular aspirations, how devices or instruments are mobilised and legitimised through certain sorts of programmatic ambition, a sort of aspiration made collective and real. Anthony Hopwood used to talk about similar things: the relationship between costing and the notion of costliness. He had a Foucauldian spirit to his writing without being a card-carrying Foucauldian. But the one thing that I would have liked us to emphasise a bit more was the multiple, differentiated – possibly contradictory - nature of programmes. It would almost be against the spirit of what we have argued to talk of a hierarchy. So, programmes can be multiple. There is a danger at times that they become invested with more coherence than they really merit. It's relevant because if, for instance, you're studying factory reform processes in the USA then you have national level debates about forms of economic citizenship and that's a meta-level debate. But there are also corporate level formulations about what is being done in the name of competition with Japan and so on. And then you also have factory-level articulations of those questions. We discuss these multiple and overlapping dimensions in the paper I mentioned earlier, 'The Factory as Laboratory'. In health care and social care, you have a similar multiplication of programmes. For instance, in the UK you have a 'modernising' ambition for the public sector as a whole, that then comes into contact with a whole range of different things, particularly a very strong sense of professional identity among medics, and also albeit to a lesser extent perhaps social workers; and then there are people at the front-line who have to deliver pressure-relieving mattresses to an individual. The task is to hang onto the idea of programmes, but to look at them as multiples, and not necessarily coherent or consistent. The worry I have is that when people go to study a social worker going to get this particular mattress then people end up thinking they are studying 'reality', rather than a set of actions and arguments that contain even a 'small parcel of thought', as Foucault put it. So, programmes cannot be treated as hard-line definitions, and certainly not as unitary. Programmes – and the idea of programming – works through many more levels, which interact and overlap.

**AM:** Let me be clear. It would be wrong to understand the delivery of a mattress, say, the reality on the ground, as derived from a programme.

**PM:** Exactly. But it would be equally wrong to see it as wholly divorced from, for instance, the professional identity of social workers or the 'modernising government' programme. To put it differently, some programmes are more systematised, more articulated, more generalised than others. It's effectively what people keep calling resistance, and then complain that they don't find enough resistance in Foucault's writings. So, it would be about counter-arguments, counter-programmes, conflicting or non-aligned programmes, though they may not even merit the word programmes always: to pluralise the notion of programmes, to think in terms of the programmatic, the hoped-for, the wished-for.

**AM:** Would there be a danger that you may smuggle in relative autonomy?

**PM:** That's true: although it would be relative autonomy in terms of a whole range of things, not just the economy, and not hierarchically. So not really.

**AM:** It would be about extending that sense of openness, contingency, to different levels, different types of programmes.

**PM:** This has been prompted by my current worry that economising, marketising, quantifying and so on get conflated, their differences obliterated, and in a phobic manner by some commentators. We need to remember that forms of quantification by actuaries and health economists are not the same as overt attempts to marketise a domain. Some forms of quantification do have economising behind them, and some of them have marketising ambitions, but others are rather old-fashioned bureaucratic resource allocation models. So, one must be careful to pluralise quantification. This is what my colleagues and I argue in the paper I mentioned earlier, forthcoming in *Sociologie du Travail*. In practice, there is not an infinite number of programmes, because they have to have a certain ability to link up, mobilise and so on. We need to examine how programmes and forms of intervention interact, conflict, or at least go in different directions. To study and write across those different registers is actually very difficult. The danger is that one programme is often privileged and accorded greater coherence than it merits, and here we come back to the issue of neoliberalism, and then you lose that sense of plurality, of connectedness and contradiction. Equally, though, if it were just a morass of unrelated things then it wouldn't be terribly interesting. But what is interesting is that quite disparate programmes do gain a consistency and a connectedness. That consistency seems to be necessary if a programme is to produce effects.

**AM:** One theme that has run through all your work with Nikolas Rose and others has been an insistence that your work is empirical and historical but never theoretical. You have explained that's partly to do with your own biography: of having emerged from a tradition that was exclusively, excessively theoretical. Equally, and your notion of programmes speaks to this, you deliberately chose not to investigate the lived experience of working people, patients or inmates.

**PM:** It was something of a reaction against 'Theory': that's true. Or at least a reaction against Theory that tries to overly systematise, overly structure. We do emphasise the empirical, the historical. Here and there, we do talk about how these things get articulated

and mobilised as projects. And we do return again and again to a small number of organising categories or concepts: rationalities, programmes and technologies; assemblages; action at a distance; representing and intervening; chains of calculation is another. More recently, the notion of mediating instruments I've found very helpful to think about things that embed different and sometimes contradictory things or aspirations, or that link different domains, in one instrument or model. And, by so doing, connect up languages and processes that were previously not connected up. So, there is actually a relatively long list of concepts and categories that we've used repeatedly because we find them helpful. But that is different from wanting to turn that into some sort of theoretical apparatus which can only be bought into wholesale, in its entirety. This is not anti-theory so much as a theoretical eclecticism that is much more permissive than the theoretical tradition that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s. The main driver is to be permissive and useful: categories can be used, or not, depending on the problem at hand. There is, of course, Foucault's comment that his work should be used as a tool-box. Regardless of whether or not Foucault actually said this, or quite what he meant by it, I feel that there is a set of categories which are a useful tool-box, which are sort of complementary, and which have some loose affiliation. But you can use some of them without being obliged to use all of them. You can use one conceptual tool but not another. This is not a hierarchical arrangement, nor does usage necessarily suggest that one tool is always more useful than another. Any notion of a theoretical hierarchy, of a completeness was exactly what I was trying to get away from.

**AM:** Until the last thirty years, all craft apprentices, whether an engineer or a building worker, would quite literally make their own tool-box; and often make some of their own tools as well. Now, some tools were made to certain standards but then might be personalised to the individual and to the tasks they met. These were tool-kits that were standard but that were also personalised and modified according to the types of work being done.

**PM:** That's a very apt metaphor. To summarise: it's more of a push towards concepts and categories which are useful, and which do have some affiliation with each other.

**AM:** In terms of methodology, Foucault listens to debates amongst experts. He listens to debates amongst criminologists and penologists rather than to gaolers or convicts. This means he interrogates public archives, for expert knowledge has to be public, to some extent. Now, for historians, Foucault's methodological choice not to burrow deep into the private archives of prisons or asylums is a failure. Foucault listens to the formulation of programmes where one can hear experts developing their expertise. The difficulty is that it is much easier to represent knowledge than it is to represent power.

**PM:** That would not be so true of some of Foucault's work, especially *Histoire de la Folie*. In my own work and my work with Nikolas Rose, we were working at a slightly lower level effectively: working with welfare policies – programmes, if you like – rather than political philosophy. Or the programmes of managers and management. So, I don't think that's entirely true of all of Foucault's writings. But it is the case that he was not examining 'real life' in the prisons, or in asylums, as he made clear in 'Questions of Method'. But as he also remarks there, it would be an impoverished notion of reality if one thought that the study of programmes and practices was not part of reality. That is consistent with my focus on programmes. This is something that organisation theory has always struggled with: loose coupling, uncoupling and so forth. If I thought that the idea of 'economic citizenship' that I studied with Ted O'Leary in the Caterpillar case was completely divorced from, and meaningless to, people on the shopfloor it would not have been worth studying. But that doesn't mean that the various pronouncements about new forms of economic citizenship were an accurate reflection of 'real life' on the shop floor. We did interviews, we did go around shopfloors, and it is interesting how the narratives that employees create have some resonance with the meta-narratives that management were creating. For me, that's the issue, the meeting point. In some cases, dismissing 'economic citizenship' completely; in some cases, selecting some parts. For instance, the ways that employees appropriated the management language of autonomising; or spoke of their own 'business' on the shopfloor. It becomes a question, if you like, of varying modes of performativity, most of which require other conditions in order to operate or produce effects: to what extent do these things have effects? So, I feel very strongly that the things that we have studied do have effects on the ways that people live their lives. The study of those effects is tremendously difficult, they require the skills of a social psychologist or an ethnographer. But there is evidence that people start reframing what they do, rearticulating why they do it, and what it means, in terms of some affiliation to some broader programme, and also at times in opposition to it.

**AM:** A final question: where next for governmentality, given that you have established a certain family of concepts, a certain way of doing research? Since governmentality is so bound up with neoliberalism will the concept expire when neoliberalism expires?

**PM:** I don't think the governmentality project will expire if, or when, neoliberalism expires because the technologies are durable. And, as we have both already suggested, we need to be careful at the very least to not think of neoliberalism as a coherent political philosophy or programme. And we need to think of the variable couplings between certain programmes or articulated aspirations and the instruments that help them to operate. An example would be standard costing, which is equally at home in the Taylorised factories in the USA in the early twentieth century, in the Soviet Union around the same time, and now in hospital resource allocation mechanisms in the UK and elsewhere. The stability of the technologies, their ability to travel, and the variable couplings with a range of programmes will guarantee that this way of studying governmentality will continue to be fruitful. Some of the concepts and categories – programmes, technologies, chains of calculation, mediating instruments - are already being used quite widely. We have a little tool-kit that we have some experience with,

and have found to be of some use. Personally, I hope that this spirit of enquiry will continue: to look at problems that are interesting and relevant: to unpack what is going on beneath the so-called neoliberal headlines of economising, quantifying, marketising and consumerising. To be attentive to the plurality of modes of governing, and their open-endedness, even in times when it is difficult to retain optimism that things may change.

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I'm always hesitant when you hear someone say that they are using Foucault's theories. I always reply that they may be using his categories or concepts