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## **Introduction: Liberalisms, Government, Culture**

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**The definitive version of this article is published in:**

Bennett, T., Dodsworth, F. and Joyce, P. 2007, 'Introduction: Liberalisms, Government, Culture', *Cultural Studies*, 21(4-5): 525-548.

**The definitive version of this article is available online at:**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a779661259>

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**The journal *Cultural Studies* is available online:**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713684873>

(institutional or subscribed access may be required)

**doi:** 10.1080/09502380701278947

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## Introduction: Liberalisms, Government, Culture

Tony Bennett, Francis Dodsworth & Patrick Joyce

When discussing the relations between an analytics of governmentality and that of sociologies of governance, Nikolas Rose suggests that the former is most usefully distinguished in terms of the orientation which guides inquiry and directs its focus. As distinct from the concern with the networks of relations between individual and institutional actors that characterises sociologies of governance, studies of governmentality are concerned with ‘a particular “stratum” of knowing and acting’ (Rose 1999, p. 19). By examining the role played by particular regimes of truth, and the ways in which these are assembled into distinctive apparatuses through which specific forms of power are organised and brought to bear on specific problems, such studies trace the conditions which make possible varied kinds of intervention into the conduct of conduct, whether of oneself or of others. And their orientation, Rose argues, is ‘diagnostic rather than descriptive’ in the sense that, by adopting ‘an open and critical relation to strategies of governing attentive to their presuppositions, their assumptions, their exclusions, their naiveties and their knaveries, their regimes of vision and their spots of blindness’, their concern is to open up a ‘space for critical thought’ that operates within and against the present (Rose 1999, p. 19). By focusing on the contingency of the forms of power that are assembled in the present, an analytics of governmentality makes it possible to think how the present could be made otherwise, and it does so, Rose argues, from the perspective of bringing about different articulations of the relations between government and freedom from those which currently obtain.

There are evident similarities here between the analytic orientation of governmentality theory and that of cultural studies which has always stressed, sometimes perhaps too stridently,<sup>1</sup> the radical and mobile contextualism of its own concern with the present. Lawrence Grossberg has recently urged the need to renew this aspect of cultural studies, defining its orientation, too, by calling on it to probe the contradictions of liberal modernity in order ‘to shape an alternative modernity as the future’ (Grossberg 2006, p. 1). There are differences, of course: the concept of the conjuncture that Grossberg advocates is both composed differently and, as an articulated set of relations between the economic, political and the cultural, is more unified than Rose’s conception of the present as a more ad hoc and looser assemblage of governmental rationalities and technologies of rule; and there are still few signs that cultural studies is able, as Rose recommends, to think through the implications of a politics of contestation that is not grounded in a theory of resistance.<sup>2</sup> But these are differences within what are, nonetheless, strikingly resonant characterisations of the purposes of intellectual work and the manner in which it should be conducted. Furthermore, both traditions enjoin, as a condition for thinking creatively about the future, a sober assessment of how things are (Grossberg’s ‘what’s going on’) and, just as

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<sup>1</sup> Too stridently in the sense that this is often claimed as an attribute which, in lieu of clearly stated theoretical characteristics or methodological procedures, uniquely distinguishes cultural studies. This claim is, in our view, impossible to sustain

<sup>2</sup> Responses to governmentality theory in cultural studies have often complained that it lacks an account of resistance, thus showing little heed of the arguments governmentality theory has advanced against the need for such an account. Since governmentality theory does not posit a unified or all-encompassing source of power, but a conflicted mesh of competing and often contradictory governmental programmes validated by different forms of expertise, emerging from different sites, etc., the fact that specific forms of power are always contested arises out of such competing and contradictory programmes. This obviates the need for an account of resistance which seeks to locate a capacity to resist in a special quality or mechanism of subjectivity that can stand forth against a power that threatens to overwhelm it. Where theories of resistance are called for, Rose argues, this is usually to validate some forms of contestation over others (Rose 1999, p. 279).

important, of how they came to be so: that is, an account of how the present, or the current conjuncture, is organised and of how its different elements have been assembled into distinctive configurations so that these might be prised apart intellectually in order to produce that ‘space for critical thought’ that both lay a claim to.

These shared orientations have shaped the ground where the concerns of governmentality theory and cultural studies have been brought together to explore how those regimes of truth, practices and apparatuses that are specifically cultural are implicated in modern forms of governmentality.<sup>3</sup> This has been especially true of the work that has taken its cue from the agendas of neo-liberalism and the new forms of self-shaping and management that these require. Yet, invaluable though this work has been, it usually operates within quite short time lines with the consequence that the present is often brought into view too conjuncturally by being separated off from the longer histories of its formation. And where, for historians influenced by governmentality theory, those longer histories have been precisely the point at issue, this has sometimes been at the price of a failure to make explicit connections to the politics of the present.

This special issue addresses this situation in two ways: first, by exploring the relations between liberalism, government and culture over the period from the mid-eighteenth/nineteenth century to the present, and second, by deploying approaches to the analysis of culture that have informed the work of both those working in cultural studies and cultural historians concerned with governmentality theory. The papers that we have brought together to do so were, except for one,<sup>4</sup> first presented at the inaugural conference of CRESC, the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change, that was held in Manchester in July 2005.<sup>5</sup> With the exception of Angela McRobbie’s paper, which was presented as a keynote address, the papers were presented in the strand of the conference that we convened on behalf of the research group within CRESC whose work focuses on the relationships between culture, governance and citizenship with special reference to the historical formation, transformations and limits of liberal government.

The inclusion of a concern with the limits of liberal government within our research rubric is important. For, as Mitchell Dean notes, although Foucault’s essay on governmentality (Foucault 1991) was not specifically focused on the analysis of liberal forms of government, most of the subsequent literature has been concerned with the distinctive mechanisms of liberal government and the role of freedom – as a mechanism of government, not its vis-a`-vis – within these. The exceptions to this have mainly focused on the internal tensions and contradictions of liberal government, specifically with regard to its identification of those populations or circumstances where governance by more authoritarian or habitual mechanisms has been judged to be appropriate. These fault-lines of liberal forms of government have been explored in relation to the varied constituencies within liberal-democratic polities that have been, or still are, excluded from the zones of freedom through which liberal government operates due to some ‘deficiency’ that is judged to limit either their independence or their capacity for the kinds of moral and intellectual self-reflexiveness that government through freedom requires (Tremain 2005, Valverde 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase ‘specifically cultural’ begs a good many questions. We use it here to refer to work focused on the relations between governmentality and the practices of culture understood as a distinct industrial and institutional sector, culture as ways of life and the cultures of specific organisations. Relevant texts here include the essays collected in Bratich et al. (2003), Bennett (1998), Yudice (2003) and the essays collected in *Cultural Values*, vol. 6, nos. 1–2 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> The exception is the paper by Adam Geary which was referred to us while we were in the course of editing this issue and which, in view of both its strength and its resonance with the papers presented at the conference, we were pleased to include in the issue.

<sup>5</sup> CRESC is funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council and is jointly managed by the University of Manchester and the Open University. For further details of its work see [www.cresc.ac.uk](http://www.cresc.ac.uk)

They have also been extensively explored in relation to the authoritarian forms of governmentality deployed in colonial settings where, under the influence of evolutionary conceptions, subaltern populations have been excluded from liberal forms of government pending their arrival at a stage of development at which they will be judged to have acquired and to be capable of exercising the kinds of self-reflexiveness inwardness that liberal citizenship requires (Bennett 2004, Dirks 2001, Helliwell & Hindess 2002, Prakash 1999). They have been explored too, in the connections that Foucault traces between government, biopolitics and racism (Foucault 2003) and the circumstances – ranging from the colonial frontier to the holocaust – where governmentality translates into sheer bloody racial murder.

There are important issues at stake in how such exceptions are addressed and the significance that is accorded them. There are those, perhaps inevitably, who see the exception as the rule. This is true, most notably, of Giorgio Agamben who disperses the historical remit of Foucault's concerns into a general historico-philosophical account of the 'state of exception' in which a positive history of juridico-political rights is denied any place, except that of being stripped away as mere illusion, before the stark light of the concentration camp in which the command over 'bare life' which constitutes the 'real history' of Western sovereignty is revealed as the biopolitical paradigm of modernity (Agamben 1998). This is not the route we take here. To the contrary, both liberal government and its exceptions stand in need of closer historical specification and analysis so that particular modes of producing and organising freedom, the means through which these are secured, the limits to their distribution, and their interfaces with authoritarian forms of rule can be more clearly identified.

This requires a closer collaboration between work located at the interfaces between governmentality theory and cultural studies on the one hand and the new possibilities that are emerging from work conducted at the interfaces of governmentality theory and cultural history on the other. Of course, 'cultural history' itself is not only highly variegated in its connections to diverse disciplinary fields, but is itself a contested designation, in the same way indeed as 'cultural studies' is. Among many so-called 'cultural historians', including those represented in this volume, there would be uneasiness with this description, in part because of the ritualistic and meaningless repetition of the term in contemporary academic discourse, which is in itself in part a product of the discipline's overall failure both to theorise and to historicise 'culture', in this context a somewhat ironical omission. In his contribution in this volume Tony Bennett contributes to both, theorising within an historical framework, and vice versa, so that in line with the theoretical thrust of this volume as a whole, 'culture' comes to encompass the material world and to eclipse still predominating dualistic and tautological understandings of that term. These understandings also characterise much of cultural history, and are further reasons for uneasiness with the term.

The kind of disciplinary interaction espoused here cannot help but enrich each of the participants, so that the general area of 'governmentality studies' is opened up to denser and richer understandings. For example, going back to Foucault himself, his call for an 'ascending analysis of power', beginning with its micro-mechanisms and going on to consider how these mechanisms 'have been transformed by increasingly general mechanisms and forms of overall domination', comes nearer to realisation in developing a historical analytics of modern power, one, it can be added, that would have more than one direction of movement and be about more than 'domination' simply considered (Foucault 2003, p. 30). In terms of history, its particular interest in narrative, change, contingency, and temporality, together with its suspicion of teleological and purely 'presentist' interpretations of the past, serves to extend and move beyond existing understandings of governmentality. These, it must be said, have sometimes been somewhat formalistic, adopting oversimplified understandings of agency in explaining the development of governmentality. The result, parallel to some cultural historians' neglect of theory, has been a

neglect of history that also has an ironical aspect, in that theory purporting to question existing accounts often ends up buying into existing historical narratives, instead of questioning and developing them.

While these are not matters we can pursue in adequate detail here, they raise three sets of issues which merit comment before we indicate how the papers collected in this issue contribute to the nexus of concerns outlined above. The first concerns the relations between liberalisms, as a particular set of political philosophies, political programmes and policy co-ordinates, and the Foucauldian interpretation of liberal government as a set of more mundane, socio-technical instruments of rule. For while the governmentality literature has sought to disentangle these conceptually in order to clear a space for the latter in an intellectual field in which, hitherto, liberalism was understood mainly as a species of political thought and action, the two have to be put together for the purposes of historical analysis where it is the modes of connection between specific socio-technical instruments of rule and different moments in the development of liberal political rationalities that need to be clarified. The second set of issues concerns the currency of freedom on the ground, so to speak: that is, the different notions of freedom and liberty that have political force and appeal within different constituencies, and the role that these play in the relations between different liberalisms and different sociotechnical forms of liberal government. Third and finally we look at the role played by the concept of culture in Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian accounts of liberal government. Foucault's work on technologies of the self (Foucault 1988) has proved important here, providing a theoretical filter through which the basic strategy of liberal government has been conceived as one that operates via a mechanism of subjectivity through which individuals are induced to take up particular positions of auto-regulation in relation to their selves. While not disputing the cogency of such concerns our purpose here will be to probe their limitations by exploring the implications of the new interfaces that have opened up between governmentality theory and new traditions of 'cultural materialism' in which it is the capacity of particular kinds of material environments to promote the free circulation of bodies, or to create new zones of privacy and introspection, that is to be investigated.

## **Government, freedom and liberalisms**

Liberalism is not a unitary phenomenon, nor is it an a-historical one. Liberalism emerged in nineteenth-century Britain as a response to particular mode of government, one that was common in ethos across Europe but at the same time institutionally distinct in each polity. Likewise the different variants of European liberalism that developed over the course of the nineteenth century each had their own characteristics (see Bellamy 1992, 2000). Nonetheless, all of them can be seen to share an 'ethos' of government, often developed through learning from one another's programmes of rule, based around the notion that the greatest social and economic progress would occur if these domains were allowed, as far as possible, to regulate themselves and were not restricted by arbitrary interference from government or interest groups. The precise relationship between liberalism as an ethos of government as described in Rose (1999) and the history of political liberalism remains to be fully described. What follows is the beginning of an attempt to chart this terrain for the case of Britain in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

Before the emergence of liberalism, the European political imagination was dominated by a distinctive conception of government associated with the ideas of mercantilism, cameralism and 'police', in the archaic sense of the general government of the order, security and common good of the community. The aim of government here was to achieve 'the right disposition of things so as to lead to a convenient end' (Foucault 1991, p. 93, also Dean 1999, pp. 73-97). In this scheme,

civil society is ‘an entity permanently under construction’, ‘in order to allow the social body to function harmoniously an ever-growing work of regulation is required – social morality is an entity that has to be constructed by regulation’ (Tribe 1984, pp. 282, 276-7). Forming the social body in this way involved the regulation of human relationships both to encourage morality and civility and to maintain the social hierarchy, particularly focusing on relations between the sexes, master and servant, employer and employee, and householder and dependant. In Britain the movement of labourers and the poor was heavily regulated under the Settlement and Removal Act of 1662, which allowed for the removal to the parish of their birth of those seeking poor relief, and the Settlement Act of 1697, which governed the movement of the poor through the use of certificates for residence or travel and made those in receipt of poor relief and their families sport a badge identifying themselves as such (Dean 1991, Hindle 2004). Commerce was also heavily regulated, with close attention being paid to the quality and price of goods sold at market and the level of wages, which in times of difficulty could be fixed (Firth 2002, Tribe 1984).

Such measures were usually augmented with political and religious establishment in some form. In Britain the Church of England was established as the official religion of the state with the monarch as its head, although from 1689 protestant dissenters were allowed to worship in public, under oath of loyalty to the monarch, and were allowed to build their own chapels. In 1695 Catholic priests were forbidden to carry out worship and Catholics were prevented from inheriting or buying land unless they declared against their religion. This remained the case until 1778 when they were legally allowed to worship and own land. They obtained full religious liberty in 1791, however both they and protestant dissenters were excluded from public office under the Test Acts of 1673 and 1678, which required all holders of office (military or civic) and Members of Parliament to receive the sacrament under the laws of the Church of England, thus excluding those who refused from conscience.

This production of order, morality and the fostering of commerce and population growth through this form of direct and intense regulation seems entirely opposed to the idea of freedom. However, contemporaries understood freedom in different terms, not as simple freedom from interference, but as freedom from dependence or domination (Pettit 1999, pp. 17– 50, Skinner 1998). To be free one had to live in a free state governed by the rule of law. This condition was opposed to slavery, which was defined as dependence on the arbitrary will of another. One had to be self governing: to live under absolute rule where there was the possibility of arbitrary interference, however benevolent the regime may be in practice, would constitute a condition of unfreedom, regardless of whether any interference actually occurred. Central to this value system was the ideal of the common good. The good governor, for whom Cicero often stood as the model, devoted himself to the national interest, promoting public virtue, unity and commitment to the state (Miller 1994, pp. 73-149). The greatest threats to civil liberty were often seen as faction and patronage, which would draw the public and the state into dependence on the interests and wealth of a few individuals. Importantly, as Pettit (1999, pp. 35-41, 2002) rightly makes clear, interference according to the law did not constitute an end to freedom, rather it conditioned it. In this sense it is clear that the regulation of the social order according to law that has been granted public consent is not a restriction on liberty, rather it conditions it.

Equally common in eighteenth-century Britain were arguments that defined intervention in public conduct as essential to the liberty of the state. Deploying the classical metaphor of the body politic, advocates of increased social regulation argued that the luxury and vice of the population were enervating the state, which would either propel it into a state of anarchy, whereby the public would call for the strong hand of a tyrant to restore order, or it would become weak and succumb easily to foreign conquest. Freedom, then, was defined as a state between tyranny and anarchy, governed by the rule of law, where liberty was opposed not to interference but to popular license (Dodsworth, forthcoming).

The significance of liberal government is that it breaks this link between the maximum of regulation and the optimum form of government. The argument of Adam Smith is usually the archetype here. He argued that, in the case of political economy, attempts to intervene in the operation of industry or the circulation of capital with the aim of furthering the public good tended to retard rather than increase the accumulation of wealth. The best mode of government was as far as possible to remove all ‘systems of preference or restraint’, upon which ‘the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord’ (Smith 1776/1981, p. 687, also Burchell 1991). The task of government was to secure the natural operation of commercial activity which was seen to have laws of its own, beyond the knowledge or interest of any one individual.

Underlying the liberal concept of government is a sense that ‘the economy’ and ‘society’ constitute separate spheres, internally coherent, with laws of their own distinct from political ordering, which are only liable to be misunderstood by the governor. At the heart of this rationality was the assumption that the end of government was progress, a point made clearly in the work of late-eighteenth-century scientist and dissenting radical Joseph Priestley. Priestley is important because he advocates arguments close to Smith’s in ethos in the spheres of civil society, religion and politics, but also because he places the whole in the context of the revived protestant dissent that was so central to the emergence of liberalism. He argued: ‘it seems to have been the intention of divine providence, that mankind should be, as far as possible, self-taught . . . But by the unnatural system of rigid, unalterable establishments, we put it out of our power to instruct ourselves’. The consequence was that ‘we counteract the kind intentions of the deity in the constitution of the world, and in providing for a state of constant, though slow improvement in everything’. It was important to be careful not to try and fix improvement on a given course or overly-direct life ‘lest by attempting to accelerate, we in fact retard our progress towards happiness. But more especially, let us take heed, lest, by endeavouring to secure and perpetuate the great ends of society, we in fact defeat those ends’. He objects to ‘establishments’ in general, for however good they might be in one instance, they fix things somewhere (Priestley 1771/1993, p. 113). The nature of liberal government is to be wary of governing too much, in case by doing so, one defeats the very ends one is trying to achieve.

But this is only a part of the story, because liberalism is not simply an ‘ethos’ of government, it is one that emerged at a particular historical moment in early-nineteenth-century Britain, and to which these ideals of progress and the limitation of government appealed. Liberalism emerged in Britain as a challenge to the established order, as a drive for emancipation from the perceived domination of British politics and society by the Anglican, landed oligarchy that was associated with the rigid system of ‘establishments’ described above. Liberals sought new freedoms in the spheres of religion, commerce and politics, and a new openness and responsiveness to public opinion in government. In doing so they hoped to renew confidence in, and respect for, authority by replacing a government conducted according to the exclusive interest of a narrow oligarchy with a coalition of different interests bound together by the rule of law, orientated around a sense of national unity (Parry 1993). This was to be achieved by breaking the symbolic and legal hold of the old order on power, epitomised by a series of transformative events, particularly from 1828-32 (Clark 2000) but which can be seen to extend as far as the repeal of the corn laws in 1846. The dissenting tradition associated with Priestley and the economic tradition associated with Smith were central to this process, particularly in the fields of religious toleration and laissez-faire respectively, however most political liberals were not strict dogmatists and they were also attached to the idea of governmental reform for a variety of pragmatic reasons and it would be mistaken to see liberalism as an attempt to systematically apply some governing ideal.

The freeing of the spheres of religion, commerce and politics from the control of the old regime is commonly seen in both governmentality and political thought in terms of freedom from interference (Pettit 1999, pp. 41-50, Skinner 1998, pp. 77-84, 96-9). This may have been true in liberal philosophy (although for a re-appraisal of the positive and civic aspects of John Stuart Mill's thought see Bellamy 2000, pp. 22-46, Miller 2000), but in liberal politics there remained an assumption of a direct relationship between freedom and government. The old order was not always opposed through a totally distinct rationality of government, but often on its own terms: rather than denying the importance of the common good or the irrelevance of patronage, its critics argued that the old order were themselves a faction, governing for their own interest, not that of the nation. Mid-Victorian liberalism remained imbued with many of the classical values (participatory citizenship, civic virtue and a concern for the common good) that are usually seen as characteristic of the previous regime (Biagini 2003). If liberals were committed to a small non-interfering state, that was partly because they feared the political consequences of being brought into dependence on it or being repressed by it, not always because of a commitment to *laissez-faire* or non-interference per se (Biagini 1992, pp. 83-93). In many senses the neo-classical eighteenth-century Whig origins of political liberalism resonated into the nineteenth century, albeit transformed in significant ways (on which see Burrow 1988, Parry 1993, pp. 14-15, 73-8, Pocock 1985, pp. 215-310).

Liberal freedom was not conceived as a condition of equality and democracy, nor was it configured as the absence of government in all cases. Rather, liberal freedom was imagined as an orderly, hierarchical state, based on property and governed by the rule of law and norms of civility. The liberal governor, a propertied, educated and civilised man, would administer government impartially for the public good, without being swayed by particular interests. Liberals sought to regulate passion, suppress barbarism and encourage character and public morality, which would be achieved by application of the correct laws to fit the human personality (Parry 1993, pp. 6, 18). The ideal of a small state interfering as little as possible in the spheres of conscience and commerce was clearly central to the liberal ideal, but it depended upon the capacity for self-government amongst the citizens or subjects of government and it is clear that liberals also saw the possession of particular capacities, or the absence of certain impediments, as fundamental to the exercise of liberal freedom.

Just as liberal politics was formed through a coalition of different interests, so the concepts that went to make up the liberal notion of government and its relation to freedom were formed through the collation of different concerns in different fields of interest – economic, political, religious and social – fields which were coming to be defined as discrete areas of operation. The first successful attack on the old regime was the repeal of the test and corporation acts in 1828 and Catholic emancipation in 1829, which enabled protestant dissenters and Catholics to hold public office and sit in parliament. The reform act of 1832 modified the franchise with the aim of ending the corrupt manipulation of politics through the purchase of 'rotten boroughs' controlled by wealthy patrons, replacing these with new parliamentary seats representing the great diversity of interests, urban, rural, commercial, manufacturing and so on, throughout British society. This was succeeded by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, which attempted to apply these principles to the major organs of local government, ensuring they were all elected, representative bodies not exclusive cliques (Parry 1993).

In the economic field, not only did the reform of the franchise bring new economic interests into the political system, but the movement for economical reform also drew upon the same notions of liberation from the control of a corrupt, wasteful oligarchy, which system was known as 'the Thing', or 'Old Corruption' and had a neo-classical heritage (Harling 1996). It is clear that the ideas of Adam Smith were vital in promoting the view that the best way to secure economic growth was to leave the economy free, as far as possible, to run according to its own immanent

laws. Equally, however, it is clear that laissez-faire was promoted as much as a vehicle to end the government of narrow vested interest and the victory of this doctrine was epitomised in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, which ended the effective subsidy of the economic interests of the landed aristocracy by the manufacturing classes.

Despite having swept away the old governmental order, liberalism did not entirely displace all its foundations. Rather, it translated them into new forms, linked them to new mechanisms and embedded them in new institutional arrangements. At the heart of the liberal ideal lay the self-governing subject, a familiar figure from humanist literature on citizenship, in whom the civic and the civil were bound together. Burchell (1995) and Ivison (1993) have traced the characteristics and capacities required of liberal citizens back to the classical, civic tradition closely associated with pre-liberal political thought and the governmental tradition of 'police'. Neo-stoic notions of self-government concerned with emancipation from the passions remained as central to the liberal citizen as to his forebears. So did politeness or civility. There was an increasing tendency in the eighteenth century to associate modern politeness and good manners, acquired through cultural encounter, with political liberty and economic progress (Klein 1989). Initially, these ideas were socially exclusive, however there is some evidence that even by the late eighteenth century they were becoming a vehicle of social inclusion as much as exclusion, while politeness increasingly modulated into civility in the sense of etiquette (Langford 2002). Both liberals and their predecessors argued that for individuals to be able to be left free from interference it was necessary that they be able to govern themselves. Increasingly they saw freedom, commerce and civility in a reciprocal relationship, where the existence and flourishing of each depended on the others. What distinguishes liberalism from its predecessor is an attempt to establish these values in the wider population in a systematic manner, through the deployment of new techniques and resources.

Liberals were not the first to attempt to ensure the orderliness and civility of their communities, nor the first to link these features with freedom (both political and commercial). But they established a new array of mechanisms to do so, in the process trying to avoid the large and rigid system of government that was seen to retard progress and oppress large parts of society. In order to meet these twin requirements they devised a system of government at a distance (Rose 1999), whereby the government would accredit and administer the appointment of experts in all spheres of life, who were themselves to oversee the actual regulation of their sphere of knowledge. Through the use of experts drawn from within the fields of concern themselves and regulating them according to their specialised knowledge of the laws immanent to them, these different fields of culture, economy and society were to govern themselves according to the principles of their operation. These were under the general oversight of disinterested observers sitting in what was becoming a regulatory centre of government, who could manage the interactions of the different fields so that one did not impinge on the others to the detriment of the wider public good. One of the most significant of those fields was culture, which was coming to be seen as a discrete sphere, whose purpose was both to civilise the individual and to provide them with the means of civilising themselves. Yet, whatever the role played by this understanding of culture in the historical development of the practices of liberal government, it was a limited one when seen in the wider context of the new cultural-material environments that comprised an integral component of new ways of arranging and governing through freedom.

## **Culture and liberal government**

It will be instructive, here, to go back to Nikolas Rose who, toward the end of *Powers of Freedom*, draws on Thomas Osborne's (1998) account of the role played by the aesthetics of existence in Foucault's later work on the history of sexuality to offer a sketch of a political

imagination that would be 'beyond government'. Foucault's suggestion that we should each try to make our own life a work of art, Rose argues, has to be understood not as a politics of individual dandyism or consumerised narcissism but as a more general principle of living that needs to be understood contrapuntally in terms of the other principles of living it stands against. Here is how he puts it:

This life politics was defined, in part, by what it was not – it was *not conducted under the sign of a morality* (in the name of a heteronomous moral code), *not conducted under the sign of an epistemology* (in the name of a hidden truth or desire revealed by knowledge which it is one's aspiration to realise), *not conducted under the sign of a regime of authority* (subordination to the organisational demands of a party) *and not conducted in relation to an absolute end point at some future time* (to which the present must be subordinated). Rather than subordinate oneself in the name of an external code, truth, authority or goal, such a politics would operate under a different slogan: each person's life should be its own telos.' (Rose 1999, pp. 282-83)

The Ur-script underwriting these formulations is, of course, Kant's conception of the aesthetic in which – to cut an exceedingly long story very short indeed – the account of the link between aesthetic judgement and disinterestedness that characterised the eighteenth-century English and Scottish discourses of taste is reworked to undermine the subsumption of aesthetic judgement to reason, and to state authority, that characterised the aesthetics of Leibniz and, more especially, that of Christian Wolff.<sup>6</sup> The work of art, in inducing a free play of the imagination and the understanding that is not dictated by any determinate concept or rule, serves to symbolise the freedom – the self-governance that is voluntary – which, for Kant, is the essence of morality. In this way, to recall Rose's formulations, an 'aesthetics of existence' that is founded on this experience is located in a space that has been cleared to one side of morality, knowledge and the law, while the only teleology that it is folded into is that of its own becoming.

It is small wonder, then, that Kant's account of the aesthetic should have played so pivotal a role in accounts of the relations between culture and liberal government since the aesthetic encounter between the individual and the work of art is the site for the production of an interiority in which a regulative relationship to the self is freely entered into. Yet it is, at the same time, an unduly restrictive point of entry into the historical formations of liberal government precisely to the extent that it interprets the relations between freedom and government as ones that are focused exclusively on the organisation of subjectivities – on the space and scope for freedom that is produced by the inner organisation of the self. This, as we have already argued, has been the principal concern of the cultural studies literature that has interpreted liberal government as being essentially concerned with the varied kinds of work on themselves that social actors are induced to perform in order to comply 'voluntarily' with the ends toward which their governance is directed.

Bruno Latour opens up another perspective in arguing that the material environments that bear upon the 'conduct of conduct' also need to be taken into account. In a passage that is clearly meant to build on Foucault's attempts to 'materialise non-material technologies' (Latour 2005, p. 76), while also broadening them to take into account the role played by the engineering of material environments in shaping the relations between human and non-human actors, Latour pointedly probes some of the separations on which such accounts of liberal government depend:

Between a car driver that slows down near a school because she has seen the '30 MPH' yellow sign and a car driver that slows down because he wants to protect the suspension

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<sup>6</sup> We draw here on the fuller accounts of Caygill (1989) and Guyer (2005).

of his car threatened by the bump of a 'speed trap', is the difference big or small? Big, since the obedience of the first has gone through morality, symbols, sign posts, yellow paint, while the other has passed through the same list to which there has been added a carefully designed concrete slab. But it is small since they have both obeyed something: the first driver to a rarely manifested altruism – if she had not slowed down her heart would have been broken by the moral law; the second driver to a largely distributed selfishness – if he had not slowed down his suspension would have been broken by the concrete slab. Should we say that only the first connection is social, moral and symbolic, and that the second is objective and material? No. . . . One cannot call oneself a social scientist and pursue only some links – the moral, legal, and symbolic ones – and stop as soon as there is some physical relation interspersed in between the others. (Latour 2005, pp. 77-78)

The significance of this aspect of Latour's work has not escaped cultural historians who have interpreted the forces and powers that are folded into material environments as themselves having the capacity to organise certain kinds of freedom – freedom of movement and circulation – which, while not in the least requiring the kinds of voluntary assent that Latour attributes to his first driver, have nonetheless proved of crucial significance in organising the free-flow of bodies, goods, and communications that liberal polities and economies require. There is now a considerable body of historical scholarship that has focused on the material infrastructures of governance in these ways (see, for example, Hunt 1999, Hannah 2000, Kharkhordin 1999, Prakash 1999, Dirks 2001 and Vernon 2005), and Joyce's (2003) study of liberalism and the city involves consideration of the material infrastructure of the city amongst other dimensions of the material world. It shows how liberal governance was both deployed and experienced in terms of the creation of a sort of political spatiality, which was central to the creation of political subjectivities.

However, it is apparent that the place where new disciplinary intersections with governmentality have drawn perhaps most inspiration is indeed science studies and the history of science and technology. The 'new cultural materialisms' that are emerging within and across these disciplines are indebted, for instance to Ken Alder's (1997, 1998) exemplary study of technology and the French revolution. Alder's work concerns the efforts of eighteenth-century state military engineers in France to produce functionally identical artefacts – weaponry of all sorts, for example. Encountering the resistance of merchants and artisans, military engineers defined these artefacts with instruments such as technical drawing and tools of manufacturing tolerance, which the engineers then refined in increasingly rule-bound ways to forestall further subversion. However, these new standards of production themselves arose from the social conflict of the state and these different groups, so that these standards can be understood as reproducing but also partially resolving this conflict, now in material forms which appeared to take on the nature of 'objectivity'.

The creation of 'manufacturing tolerance' in the production of artefacts operated in relation to the emerging political toleration of the French state for its citizen-producers. In this period, the state's rules regarding the invention, production and consumption of artefacts came to be defined in formal terms, rather than in terms of particularistic privileges granted on an individual basis. More generally, economic relationships between the state and its citizen producers were henceforth defined in public terms, and not as a matter of private law or the moral obligation of subjects. These developments were of a piece with the emergence of manufacturing tolerance as a way to define the boundary between the state's need for commodities and the right of its subjects to make an economic livelihood. The juridically limited state and the decentralised capitalist order which emerged at the end of the eighteenth century thus put an end to the particularistic

legal status which both persons and artefacts had enjoyed under the old regime. As Alder says, one might even say that henceforth objects could in some sense be considered 'objective'.

Alder emphasises how the seeming objectivity of material things and processes represented the material instantiation of social relations, and from Joyce's point of view of an interest in governmentality that interprets 'liberal' in a somewhat different sense to Alder, one can nonetheless certainly see the 'engineering in' of new sorts of political forms in nineteenth-century Britain as well as France, forms that can usefully be called liberal in both situations. A recent exemplary work which might also be mentioned is Peter Becker and William Clark's (2001) *Little Tools of Knowledge* in which a science studies/ history of science, technology and medicine combination sits quite happily alongside the influence of Foucault, as part of an eclectic mix that operates beyond the sometimes narrow confines of governmentality approaches.

What becomes significant in the light of this and other work is therefore the extension of the activities of history and the social sciences into the realm of the 'natural', nonhuman, material world which has usually been considered as beyond the 'social'. Work in this area, particularly at the intersections of history, the sociology of material culture, and science studies (see, for example, Hecht 1998, Scott 1998, and Mitchell 2002) has proved especially fruitful. This significance is apparent for example in the work of Chandra Mukerji (1997) on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French state, work concerning the ways in which the power of the French state was performed in the French landscape in the seventeenth century, in terms of the 'territorialisation' of the state, for example in the fortifications at the periphery and the gardens at the centre of the new French state. She also considers the crucial role of major public works, such as the building of canals, in enacting the material power of the state. Territorialisation also took material form in the dispersal of state power into French products and economic practices, encouraged and developed by the state, so that France became part of the economic landscape itself, the landscape of industrial and rural production in its everyday forms. It is apparent here that the French state was discursively constituted and experienced, but also experienced in ways other than this discursive articulation alone, in terms of practice and material life. One simply lived out the state as part of practice of everyday life, in what for the sake of simplicity can be called habitual, embodied, 'pre-discursive' action.

The work of Richard Biernacki (1995, 1997) considers how what he calls the pragmatic form of a symbolic practice may carry messages apart from the signs these practices use, demonstrating how nineteenth-century German and British workers received different concepts of labour as a commodity only in the process of using their piece rate scales. Not only in this dimension of practice, but also in the spatial arrangements of factories in Germany and Britain, and in the different forms of time discipline practiced in both countries, different notions of abstract labour were carried over long periods of time. Biernacki points to how an emphasis on culture in practice (rather than culture of or for practice) calls on bodily competencies that have their own structure and coordinating influence, extending beyond purely semantic relations in a sign system.

### **The papers in this issue**

The first set of essays illustrates these concerns with the relations between liberal government and culture understood as a nexus of material infrastructures. In Tom Crook's contribution the humble space of the cubicle is examined as part of an increasingly elaborate infrastructure of a sort related to but not quite the same as infrastructure involved directly with securing freedom of movement and circulation, namely infrastructure of a material, spatially elaborate sort, operating on the body and the construction of the self in order to produce privacy and individuation. The

cubicle was a space for the creation of social norms and discipline, but also one for the transaction of these, not merely their inculcation, as it was for the transaction of many sorts of social relationship, for example class, gender, and nature. In what sense, though, can such material objects and processes be called political in general, or 'liberal' in particular? In this case, 'liberalism' can be said to reside in the conjunction of materiality with liberal political and cultural programmes and projects, of both political and extra-political kinds expressing particular sorts of agency fairly clearly discernible as liberal. However, there is a sense in which the actual objects themselves, while not having intrinsic meanings, nonetheless seem to have certain intrinsic dimensions of agency, conceiving of this in terms of certain organising potentials, capacities, or framings of behaviour and thought. As Crook suggests, the cubicle was always a fragile combination of human and nonhuman agency, so that the aim of creating civil subjects through freedom might easily degenerate into licence and deviance, in this example the privacy of the cubicle becoming in certain circumstances a space for pleasure as well as self-control. In material terms, the associated technology itself was continually in danger of deteriorating, and subverting its own fluent operation.

Chris Otter takes the question of 'liberal objects' head-on, paying particular attention to nineteenth-century Britain again, this time as not only the great age of modern liberalism's emergence, but the great age of engineering, the engineering of things and souls, but above all of souls through things. This is apparent especially in liberalism's retreat from the state, and its clear attempt to materialise forms of thought and behaviour in such a way as to facilitate 'indirect rule', or 'rule at a distance', these forms of rule being characteristic of liberalism's first great age, so that from the very beginning it can be seen that technology, in this case engineering, and the forms of governance characteristic of the modern state have had the most intimate of relationships. The self-sufficient, self-organising technological system ran in parallel with liberalism's projection of the self-ordering spheres of economy and society. Otter sees how technology emerged as a set of practices essential to liberal subjectivity, which were promoted and imagined as such. Of course, they did not necessarily work like this, and they (or something like them) could be promoted and imagined in other ways, and in other contexts outside liberalism.

However, if the technological forms described seem very often to have been especially conducive to the realisation of liberal programs of different sorts, then their material operation in nonliberal situations still carried organising potentials and capacities similar to those present in liberal regimes: piped water or the WC created a capacity for 'privacy' in all political systems and regimes, though in nonliberal regimes different kinds of encounter with the individual self, indeed a different kind of 'individual', would have been evident, and hence a different sort of 'privacy', if that is indeed the appropriate term to use. There is, therefore, a limited but real sense in which 'liberalism' can be said to inhere in the object itself. Nonetheless, 'free', 'open', 'unregulated' communication systems, if such have ever existed, are and were in fact more conducive to liberal forms of government than others, given their characteristic emphasis on free movement, action, behaviour and thought. However, in line with Crook's observation about the ambivalence of liberal technologies, Otter's parting comment on the 'technological fix' is of considerable significance, namely the belief that technology is a solution to any problem, a belief dating at least back to this time.

In Liz Mcfall's paper, it is apparent how state and nonstate, and political and nonpolitical initiatives, have combined to create major forms of governmentality. Governmentality has been realised in spheres outside the state and then articulated by various mechanisms of greater and greater generality, as was noted earlier, one of these mechanisms being the state itself. Here the crucial point is made that the liberalism by which we have been and are being governed is not only directed and shaped by the state but by myriad forms of activity outside it, particularly in the

sphere of capitalist economic life. The nineteenth-century life assurance industry created hugely significant forms of conduct, forming in the process what can be said to be infrastructures of another sort to those considered previously. Therefore, life assurance was in many ways an exemplary technique of liberal government, operating through the means of market-based self-rule. This technique depended on the creation of a particular form of knowledge that blended impartiality, self-interest and disinterestedness in different ways among the providers and recipients of it. It was a technique, Mcfall argues, that was realised in a 'quite magnificent balancing act between the competing claims of religion and science, interest and interest, belief and objectivity', combining pious sentiment and plausible science in a unique way.

The second set of essays explores the relationship between culture and government in different forms. Tony Bennett argues for a major reconfiguration of research in the cultural field. Drawing upon the model of science studies and actor network theory, he argues for the development of 'culture studies', as distinct from 'cultural studies'. Cultural studies, he argues, has lost sight of the distinctiveness of the cultural field. While there is no ontological foundation to the distinction between the cultural and the social, there is a powerful historical ground for such an analysis. Rather than view culture as a universal symbolic phenomenon constitutive of the social, he argues we need to explore the historical formation of 'culture' as a distinctive form of public organisation, an assemblage of certain artefacts, buildings, people and practices with the purpose of acting upon the social in certain ways and so forming the human character.

Kevin Hetherington goes on to explore a particular instance of the use of culture as a tool of government in urban regeneration. Focusing on Urbis, the museum of the modern city in Manchester, he identifies the emergence of a novel mode of urban government: the entrepreneurial development of the civic sphere through public and private partnership. This has transformed not only how the civic sphere is formed and presented, being bound up with the consumerist and commercial life and image of the city rather than existing separately from them, but also how the private sector operates, reducing the domination of market determinism and instead having to concern itself with public consultation, social inclusion, diversity, access and accountability.

In contrast, the two final essays in this section explore culture (in the sense of acquired modes of conduct) as the subject of government, as a problem to be managed and engaged with. Rebecca Lawrence and Chris Gibson analyse the way in which culture is governed by making certain social practices a condition of government assistance in remote Indigenous Australian communities. These disciplinary requirements form a part of 'shared responsibility agreements' which, it is argued, articulate a hierarchy of culture and mobilise long-standing colonial discourses about Aboriginal people as dependent and ungovernable. Here, the development of a certain 'level' of culture, defined hierarchically, is encouraged through financial incentives.

Finally, Adam Geary argues that the concept of 'culture' has been central to understanding of HIV transmission in AIDS prevention research and practice. In a situation where only individual conduct can effectively prevent the spread of the disease, un-reflexive culture, the learned social practices within which the person is immersed, is conceived as a barrier to the capacity for individuals to take responsibility for, and care of themselves. AIDS prevention programmes have, therefore, been organised around the notion of the transformation of behaviours and values, in part, and returning to the more traditional theme of culture in the sense of *Bildung* discussed by Bennett, by encouraging people to become aware of their own culture and act upon themselves as a consequence.

The papers gathered together in the final set speak to each other through their different concerns with the ways in which the relations between liberalism and government have been, and are still

being, reshaped in Britain via the discourses, policies and practices of New Labour. The work of Stuart Hall (2003), Norman Fairclough (2000) and, more recently, that of Deborah Steinberg and Richard Johnson (2004) has provided a general analysis of New Labour discourse within which the concerns of each of these papers can be located. Characterised by a tendency to say one thing while meaning and doing another, this discourse has served as the mechanism through which the social democratic traditions of Old Labour – and of many sections of the non-aligned left – have been subalterned to a neo-liberal agenda that is in thrall to the dictates of global capitalism. Between them, the essays of Helen Rees Leahy, Angela McRobbie, John Clarke and Janet Newman, and Kath Woodward provide a revealing analysis of the contradictions this has generated across a number of different policy domains: arts and cultural policies, labour market policies (especially in relation to women), public service policies (especially health policies), and the interfaces between sports policies and the management of cultural diversity.

Helen Rees Leahy's concern is with a particular, and highly contradictory, instance of George Yudice's conception of the 'instrumentalisation of culture' (Yudice 2003) in which culture is conscripted or mobilised as a resource for some extrinsic purpose. The case she has in mind is that of the use of the UK Heritage Lottery Fund to purchase Raphael's *Madonna of the Pinks* on behalf of the National Gallery. Her interest is in the contradictions occasioned by the attempts to seek some accommodation between, on the one hand, the traditional values of connoisseurship that had been invested in Raphael's work over the previous 150 years or so of their official canonisation within Britain's major national art institutions, and, on the other hand, the need to justify the use of Lottery money by presenting its purchase as contributing to the New Labour cultural policy goals of cultural diversity and social cohesion. Rees Leahy show that the gap between these was never closed as, in both its metropolitan installation at the National Gallery, and in being toured throughout the nation to make it accessible to all, the *Madonna of the Pinks* never broke free from the middle-class circuits of art consumption to connect with 'the people' who had supposedly bought it.

Angela McRobbie's article focuses on the 'new sexual contract' that is involved in the position that is accorded young women in both New Labour's construction of a 'new meritocracy' and in the forms in which they are hailed or interpellated in consumer culture. Welcomed and empowered as a sign of a 'can do' culture, the young, educated woman is granted full economic capacity in the labour market on condition of entering into a post-feminist sexual contract in which she is obliged to 'freely choose' a sexed identity that is subordinated to the codes of hegemonic masculinity and the phallic order. McRobbie explores the contradictions that this entails by examining the forms of post-feminist masquerade that are involved in performing the role of the 'phallic girl' as the cultural figure, now widely circulated within women's consumer culture, through which these contradictions are primarily enacted. McRobbie also notes the continuing inequalities which mark this allegedly 'post-inequality' governmentalisation of sexuality as a consequence of the privileged forms of its classed and racialised inscriptions. She also notes that being welcomed into the labour market as the subject of a set of independent capacities does not prevent young women from, still, bearing an unequal share of the burden of domestic labour.

One of the more general aspects of the Blairite project has been its determination to transform social welfarist and social democratic investments in the value of public services into those of the citizen consumer. John and Clarke and Janet Newman are concerned with how far this has changed the identifications of those who use Britain's National Health Service and attitudes toward public health care provision more generally. Their conclusion is: not much. Drawing on a study of public service users in the UK, they show that National Health Service users identify themselves as neither citizens nor consumers but, for the greater part, as patients, members of the public, or service users. Their analysis of the values invested in such identifications suggests the

failure of New Labour to erode, or even to make significant inroads into, older social welfarist and social democratic conception of public health provision. This sceptical dissent, they argue, expresses a widespread detachment from the New Labour project which, however, since it finds no alternative modes of political articulation, remains largely passive in form.

Like Clarke and Newman, Kath Woodward focuses her attention on both the extent to and the respects in which identities – in this case those associated with sport, and especially soccer – have been reshaped in the context of New Labour’s neo-liberal policies. Reviewing the development, since New Labour first came into office in 1997, of policy initiatives directed at involving sports organisations in the development and implementation of policies of social inclusion and cultural diversity, Woodward reports on her study of the websites of several soccer clubs and her interviews with club community workers and fans. Her conclusion is that while there is some evidence that sporting identities have been reshaped in the name of a new socially inclusive, tolerant ethos of citizenship, there is also evidence of failure to find accommodation with – and in some cases resistance to – this governmental aspiration to construct sport as an space of civic management.

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