

Materiality, power and critique: governmentality and Marxism**Introduction**

Surely, one of the big challenges confronting critical theorists today has to do with explaining neoliberalism's resilience in the face of its devastating social and environmental effects. There have been many attempts to account for the cultural reproduction of historical forms of capitalism, some firmly rooted in the Marxist tradition, others expressed in more hybrid forms. These attempts have opened up important debates but have often drawn a line between economic and philosophical readings of Marx and between modern modes of emancipation and postmodern scepticism. These chiasms, which opened up more decisively after the fall of communism, have been damaging to the pursuit not only of a comprehensive theoretical response to neoliberalism but also to the constitution of a political response to it. In the midst of the ongoing economic downturn, Marxist scholars have enjoyed a new lease of life. This revival is an opportunity to rekindle the critical debate and the possible accommodations between historical materialists and the proponents of the cultural turn. As an attempt to better understand the functioning and resilience of neoliberalism, this paper explores the links and complementarities between two strands of thought; governmentality, initially developed by Michel Foucault, and Marxism.¹ I argue that combining these two perspectives allows us to consider a wide range of power effects that contribute to the societal perpetuation of neoliberalism in the contemporary realm.

Michel Foucault provides one of the better known and more articulated inspirations behind the so-called postmodern turn, although he would undoubtedly have refused the accolade. If he was at odds with most of the political expressions of Marxism in his time, Foucault was concerned, either directly or indirectly, with capitalism's prodigious ability to maintain and perpetuate itself. Whether it had to do with disciplining the individual body in carceral, military, clinical and educational settings or representing the general management of contingency, fluxes, diseases at the level of the population, Foucault sought to detail the intricacies of capitalism's support systems. Whilst Marxists occupy an external standpoint from which to launch their description and critique of capitalism, Foucault aims to study it from 'within' and is interested in less conspicuous spheres of control and activity within its purview. Governmentality, in particular, looks to the internal architecture of an all-encompassing managerial rationality, with an inherent sense of its own permanence and malleability. With governmentality, Foucault sought to determine where increasingly diffuse individual and social practices coalesced outside of a pure economic determination and found that they converged towards collectivised and self-perpetuating aims such as the happiness and productivity of the population.

Foucault's reluctance to engage more fully with what he calls the juridico-political paradigm of power (Foucault: 1978), which he associated to the dominant expressions of Marxism in his lifetime, prevented him from measuring and investigating disparities in existential possibilities.

¹ In the paper, the term 'Marxism' refers to the non-economic and non-dogmatic varieties of Marxist thought, which can also be called neo-Marxism or Open Marxism.

His averseness to simplistic renderings of power in advanced capitalist societies, which have for him ceased to rely on ideology and exploitation alone, was perhaps primarily linked with his discomfort with the teleological, scientific and statist inflexions of political Marxism in 1960's and 1970's France. Although Foucault may have been justified in his misgivings, it does not mean that he was entirely correct in his neglect of vertical power structures. Several years down the line, the 2007 financial crisis has reiterated the inexorable influence of economic processes on both politics and standards of living. A number of scholars, such as the so-called new materialists (Coole and Frost, 2008), have declared that it is time to give greater consideration to material structures after decades of insistence on discourses and language. The difficult task we are faced with is then to articulate the mutually constitutive and complementary relationship between different scales of power both in theory and in practice. This seems all the more appropriate, as many contemporary social movements are careful not to reproduce the organisational forms of older militant formations.

The paper proceeds in three steps. First, it situates governmentality within the larger ambit of post-Marxist thought and identifies the affinities between early critical theory and Foucault. Second, it identifies some of the main tensions and differences between the two strands of thought with regards to power, ideology and emancipation. Third, it makes the claim that beyond these divergences, combining governmentality and Marxism allows for a multidimensional political sociology that is better equipped to unveil the socio-cultural reproduction of capitalist relations and the constitutive modalities of subjectivity under neoliberalism.

Foucault, French Marxism and Critical Theory

Foucault's own critical enterprise emerged from a particular intellectual context. In the midst of Marxism's progressive demise as a critical and political project from the 1960's onwards, the very foundations of the great humanisms were put in doubt. The unity of thought purported by the Enlightenment and its progressive variants was dismissed as another guise of the modern will to power. Spurred on by Nietzsche's critique of Western moral philosophy and Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic inquiries, a handful of theorists, most of them French, endeavoured to collapse what they saw as questionable truths and dichotomies. As opposed to referring to fixed points of origin from which to anchor claims to truth, morality and reason, thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Beaudrillard and Deleuze were interested in investigating the discontinuities, silences and contradictions inherent to western philosophy's foundational precepts and in undoing the entrenched distinctions between object and subject, rationality and irrationality, identity and otherness. Rather than posing Man as the source of cognition and history, they presented subjectivity as a fragmented and shifting amalgam, which could not be wholly assimilated into rigid categories of representation. Language and meaning were seen as open-ended fields, which constantly (re) defined themselves in relation to what they could neither know nor represent (Derrida, 1978). History no longer led to the attainment of Spirit or Communism; it did no more or no less than setting the conditions of possibility for meaningful claims or fluid and ephemeral subjectivities. The above thinkers expressed their suspicion and incredulity towards metanarratives, as they no longer believed in their ability to contain the contradictions of lived experience and the fragmentation of consciousness and identity in contemporary times (Lyotard, 1984). Most of these intellectuals wrestled with the expressions of Marxism in the political arena of their time. Although many harboured sympathies for the Marxist analysis, at least in the initial part of their careers, they were uncomfortable with its

totalizing design and with its narrow focus on economics as the ultimate source of social and intellectual production.

Foucault's relationship to Marxism was no exception. Throughout most of his career, he did not engage directly with the leading strands of French Marxism and certainly had no interest in embarking upon a detailed commentary of Marx's own books, where many others set out to find new kernels of truth, or to craft more faithful orthodoxies. The most revealing insights about Foucault's relationship with Marx and Marxism are to be found in a variety of interviews, as Foucault purposely avoided direct references to Marx in his own work. In 1960 and 1970's France, the hegemony of Marxist thought in all its guises was at its peak. Foucault's entire corpus indicates an implicit desire with do away with the manifold power-effects of Marxist theorising (Garo, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the three aspects of Marxist thought that he found particularly objectionable were its scientific pretence, its prophetic nature and its incarnation as a philosophy of the state or class ideology. To the first point, Marx's intellectual production was intimately tied to a scientific discourse that had great currency in the second half of the 19th century. The notion that science was an embodiment of truth was reiterated in many varieties of Marxism in the twentieth century, not least by one of Foucault's old mentors, Louis Althusser. We can also gather that the teleological inflections of several Marxist currents did not sit well with Foucault. Equally, he saw the enthronisation of the communist project into the state structure as one more step in the impoverishment of our political imagination (Foucault, 2008: 599). The uniformity and rigidity of the French Communist Party was certainly a factor in the demise of its socio-political project. The idea that the party was the unique intellectual and cultural space through which class-consciousness could develop made it ill adapted to the expression of multiple wills and existential forms from the late 1960's on (Foucault, 2008: 614-615). Foucault, who was briefly a member of the Communist Party in the early 1950's, quickly understood that this association was unsustainable. As he mentions in an interview 'to be a Nietzschean communist was intolerable and even ridiculous' (Foucault, 2008: 869).

Having specified that he objected to the contemporary expressions of Marxism and not to Marx as such, Foucault situates his own work in the lineage of the Second Book of Capital. He is avowedly more interested in the historical conditions of Capitalism's development than in its technical modalities (Foucault, Gordon, Patton and Beaulieu, 2012: 100-101). As is well know, Foucault's interest lies less in the subjugation of the working class in the economic structure than in the multiple sites of control that shape the subject's behaviour in more specific as well as in more profound ways. Beyond the uneasy relationship with some of his leftist contemporaries, Foucault's concerns were remarkably close to that of a group of scholars that had not been widely received in France, namely the Frankfurt School.

Foucault and critical theory

Foucault's desire to forego overly economic readings of Marx, formulaic party platforms and perfunctory dialectics bears resemblances to the early Frankfurt School's intellectual project. For one, there is a shared concern with the modern will to truth, and with how powerful metanarratives are reproduced and disseminated through the organization of knowledge and discourse. Both also favour a systematic and practical account of forms of domination and their respective theorisations shift according to historical context. However, it is only once Foucault moves beyond the 'difficulties inherent to his structuralist analysis of knowledge' and into the

‘institutional and cognitive strategies of social integration’ that he ‘enters the terrain of the Frankfurt School’ (Honneth and Roberts, 1986: 51). Honneth argues that the failure of May 1968 prompted Foucault to consider the precise ways in which political power had triumphed over the rebellion with relative ease. However, it must be noted that Foucault did not come across the Frankfurt School until much later in his life; a delayed discovery that was both, as he claimed, salutary for the development of his own thinking and a lost opportunity for a productive intellectual engagement (Foucault, Gordon, Patton and Beaulieu, 2012). In one of his last and most candid texts, *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), Foucault associates more or less explicitly with the critical ethos of the Enlightenment and situates his own endeavour within its larger ambit. Whilst it is perhaps dangerous to over-emphasize the significance of this gesture, it does speak to a certain community of interest. Like Habermas, Foucault paints Enlightenment as a promise that has yet to be fulfilled (Bahr, 1988: 102) but also as a ‘permanent reactivation of an attitude_ that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.’ (Foucault, 1984: 5). This qualified attachment to a long-standing vein of critique would seem to take Foucault a little closer to the Frankfurt School than to French poststructuralists (Bahr, 1988: 102).

Another of the noteworthy descendants of the Frankfurt School, Axel Honneth, interprets Foucault’s social theory as an attempt to craft ‘a theoretical model that begins with a definition of social action’ (1991: 103). This contrasts with critical theory’s removed conceptualisation of society, which systematically mimics the instrumentalisation of nature. Honneth maintains that Foucault’s preoccupation with the everyday dynamics of subjectification, of the institutional and cultural routines that shape and limit individual behaviour, is a more adequate point of entry into the understanding of social activity than the external and abstract combination of political economy and psychoanalysis (1991: 100). If they share a Weberian anxiety about an ever advancing and totalising administration of human societies, Foucault and early critical theorists differ on the extent to which individuals consent to social and economic arrangements. Whilst Foucault hints at the subject’s ability to reproduce and integrate administrative directives and disciplinary routines, Adorno and Horkheimer have serious reservations about humanity’s ability to extricate itself from the ever tightening grip of libidinal materialism, de-personalisation and the increasingly veiled dynamics of class exploitation. There is a concurrent divergence on the modalities of power; whereas early Frankfurt School theorists see capitalism as the elemental source of domination that dictates the content of culture, administrative structures and identity, Foucault sees domination in its diverse and local manifestations and moves away from class and labour as the overriding markers of subjectivity.

Beyond broad similarities, challenging theoretical dilemmas remain, one of which has to do with power and the other with critique and emancipation. Although the paper maintains that a combination of governmentality and historical materialism can be useful and productive, it is necessary to work through some of the difficulties involved in combining them, if only to ascertain where it is appropriate to part ways with either Marxists or Foucault.

Power, ideology and critique

Foucault’s conceptualisation of power is notoriously ambiguous. In his later work on discipline, sexuality and government, he is explicitly moving away from what he calls the sovereign, juridico-political paradigm of power, which he associates with perspectives claiming to have

discovered a single source of oppression (Marxism) or the prototype of an un-repressed being (psychoanalysis). Then again, although Foucault downplays the importance of this type of power in favour of the other two in the context of contemporary Western societies, nowhere does he argue that it completely disappears (see Neal, 2004). The problem is that Foucault does not go beyond the assertion that these three types of power operate simultaneously, albeit in an invariably complex and contingent way. What is needed, as I shall argue, is a more systematic integration of these three modalities at the theoretical level, which would then be deployed in the examination of actual practices. Foucault's conception of power does of course evolve with time. After a philosophical investigation of the modalities of truth, knowledge and meaning in the *Order of Things* (1970) and the *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault turns his attention to the practical instantiations of power at the intersection of the body and the norm, as well as that between psychological dispositions and rationalities of government. In this context, subjectivity is produced through a variety of spatial, actuarial and administrative techniques; freedom and volition can be nothing more than a perpetual and somewhat strained encounter with the endless diversity of power. His work on governmentality attempts to represent the more general relations between state and society, and some suspect that it was his way of taking in some of the left's criticism of his work on discipline.

In a certain sense, governmentality points to a more general design relating the ideational and material features of administrative organisation to the regulation of individual behaviour. It integrates micro and macro power. Biopower is incidentally found at the intersection of the techniques and systems of thought that apply to the social and to the individual body as an object of manipulation and classification (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 134). The workings of Capital and state repression can certainly be viewed as embodiments of sovereign power. Again, Foucault is much less interested in the above instantiations of power than in the processes and practices through which liberalism and capitalism perpetuate themselves. He finds that their resilience cannot solely be the product of outright domination. The question is whether historical transformations in disciplinary and governmental modes happen as a result of self-emerging, momentary configurations or if they are influenced or partially orchestrated by individuals or groups of individuals with the requisite knowledge and material capacity to effect significant changes. The first part of this section will review Foucault's conception of power. The second part offers a critical discussion of foucaultian power through a reference to the problematic notion of ideology. The third part provides a tentative normative grounding for the combination of governmentality and historical materialism.

Foucault and power

For Foucault, power is not only defined by an external imposition allowing or disallowing for particular kinds of behaviour and practices; it is inherent to the constitution of knowledge and its objects. He suggests that it be understood as;

‘the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization: as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them: as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another: and lastly, as the

strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of possibility, in the various social hegemonies' (Foucault, 1978: 92-93).

Foucault's power, which can be at once local, mobile, purposeful and non-intentional, is not without its complexities and ambiguities. Firstly, it can be inferred that the individual is not passive with regards to the various modes of objectification to which it is subjected; he or she internalises and reproduces various criteria of behaviour in order to be able to live, work and communicate. Within the increasing variety of domains of enquiry, particularly since the emergence of the normalizing sciences in the 1800's, power is beginning to inform more clearly the struggles, inclusions and exclusions implicit to the establishment of what counts as true knowledge about man. However, despite the fact it can be used strategically by specific actors or is at work in the formation of knowledge systems, it cannot be crystallized in a definite form as it is in a state of constant flux dictated by local and immediate necessities. As soon as a stable knowledge-configuration or rationality establishes itself, it is likely to be challenged, transformed, reaffirmed or discarded. Active in the most minute designs of daily life and in the most general strategies of government, it can neither be possessed nor exercised by a single entity. It is a creative and productive force that 'traverses and produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault, 1980: 119). Its effectiveness does not lie in placing a mere limit on desire but in constituting social rites and instruments of domination that are both tolerable and efficient (1980: 86). Power mechanisms are first and foremost directed at producing 'effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge_ methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control' (1980: 102). In whatever domain of knowledge, the organizational capacities of power are continually reviewed and refined.

By defining power in this way, Foucault clearly opposes its understanding in more traditional forms of political theory. He is decidedly not interested in trying to locate the nucleus of legitimate political authority and associates the will to do so with political philosophy's ongoing preoccupation with the person of the King, in other words with the perpetuation of a 'juridico-discursive' paradigm (1978: 82-85). Again, he contends that the analysis 'should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions' (1980: 96) rather than with characterizing various forms of vertical domination. Accordingly, rather than being defined negatively through the prohibitive decrees of external authorities, the formation of subjectivity has to do with assimilating and perpetuating the local requirements of power. In both *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault insists on the importance of the body as a nexus for the operation of power. What he is mainly concerned with is the interstitial space between larger institutional strategies and the body as a discrete object of study and intervention. The prison and the confessional are here seen as locations where the manipulation of the biological body and the individual soul conflate with general schemes of rule. These encounters constitute what Foucault calls a 'political technology of the body' (1977: 26). Again, punitive measures are not solely explained and justified by the fact that a crime has been committed and that it must be punished. They are not 'simply 'negative' mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but they are linked to a whole series of positive effects which it is their task to support' (1977: 24). Similarly, the ongoing valorization of the confession of sexual desires in modern history is not the story of a progressive liberation or of

a triumph over repressive cultural forms. Rather, through the extensive development of confessional modes, sex ‘becomes an issue; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it’ (1978: 26). Importantly, punitive modes and sex are both implicated a larger economy of power, which ties in to the security, health and prosperity of the population as a whole. The democraticization of right transpiring in the constitutional experiments of the end of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Western world, also contributed to the fact that life and modes of behaviour became inscribed and administered through self-produced norms rather than left at the discretion of an all-powerful sovereign.

As Foucault’s general project consists in making apparent the claims to knowledge that have been displaced or discarded by the dominant paradigms in each discursive formation, he specifies how the general, yet strategically specific logic of ‘truth’ directs relations of power. Truth, Foucault says, ‘is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements... (and) is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it’ (1980: 133). There are rules as to what constitutes a valid statement in linguistic constructions, clinical psychology or economic sciences. The consolidation of paradigms of knowledge, especially when it comes to non-exact sciences, is a consequence of a series of power effects that in turn reinforce and perpetuate certain criteria of validity. It follows that individuals who have a greater command of those criteria are more able and authorized to ‘speak the truth’. The power effects that culminate in truth tend to present the history of particular social sciences as a linear progression towards an ever more perfected form of knowledge. But Foucault intends to demonstrate that these coherent and evolutionary histories conceal the struggles inherent to the establishment of truth and his genealogies are precisely an effort to render those omissions and struggles more visible. Through painstaking documentary research, they aim to ‘rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask’ (1980: 82). A genealogy of rationalities of government, discipline or sex therefore entails a willingness to look beyond humanistic, coherent and progressive histories in order to reinstate the claims to knowledge that have been subjugated and forgotten. Equally, a genealogical perspective suggests that foundational notions of Western political theory such as freedom, legitimacy and morality have been constituted through a mixture of coercions, struggles and strategic incitements that have taken different forms according to historical context. Foucault then subverts the traditional requirement of philosophy to discover the essence of being human, free or moral to assert that truths and essences are in fact ‘things of this world’ (1980: 131), borne out of ever changing conditions of intelligibility and strategic necessities.

For Foucault, it is truth itself, truth as ‘already power,’ which is the political problem (1980: 133). He invites us to ‘detach the power of truth from the social, economic and cultural forms of hegemony’ (1980: 133). Again, Foucault is not entirely clear about what this means in concrete terms. It may be taken to mean that the present requirements to be successful, happy, effective and free must not be accepted as self-evident and inescapable but it may also be interpreted as the validation of an indiscriminate suspicion of the primary rules that make social life possible. Either way, what is most important with regards to this questioning of truth is that it should not be considered as an external standard by which current hegemonic forms can be judged but an already present configuration of power. Possibilities of resistance are therefore conditional to local and immediate modes of subjectification as opposed to general strategies orchestrated by a

willing, knowing external power with its own vision of true freedom and humanity. As soon as one relates truth to a perpetually contested, unstable and reversible thing in the present, it becomes possible to assess the degree of domination involved in the establishment of a particular truth. As an example of the practical application of such a line of critique, Foucault's enquiry into rationalities of government consists more in determining what had made liberal capitalism so enduring and effective than suggesting standards from which it could be justified, improved or invalidated. To recapitulate, power is at once relational, productive, dispersed and strategic. As is well known, Foucault's theory of power has been criticized by a broad range of commentators. Debates surrounding the conceptualisation of power are neatly illustrated in discussions on the recently revived notion of ideology.

Power, ideology and emancipation

Initially coined by the young Marx, ideology's fortunes have fluctuated greatly. In his introduction to ideology, Terry Eagleton (1991) complains that the concept has been unfairly discarded by so-called post-modernists and post-structuralists. Revisiting Lukács', Gramsci's and Althusser's respective versions of ideology, Eagleton notes that it increasingly takes the form not only of a concerted scheme of domination by the ruling classes but of an elaborate structure of meaning that guides socio-political life. As a large-scale cognitive map, it is at once inter-subjective and enmeshed in class power. For the most part, recent neo-Marxist conceptions of ideology have recognised liberalism's deeply embedded character and have largely relinquished the coarser definition of ideology as mere falsification. This would seem to take Foucault, who was very critical of the more 'traditional' view of ideology, closer to contemporary post-Marxists. Indeed, in a notable passage reminiscent of critical theory, Foucault claims that 'the production of collective interest through the play of desire is what distinguishes both the naturalness of population and the possible artificiality of the means one adopts to manage it' (2007: 73). Desire is at once natural and manufactured; government documents the population's whims, opinions, fears, customs and prejudices and acts upon those dispositions according to the general requirements set by a given rationality of government. Desire is then a productive force that needs to be tweaked and enhanced. Government's channelling of existing dispositions such as entrepreneurship and consumer proclivities contributes to the 'general interest' of the population and plays no small part in the development and perpetuation of capitalism. However, some differences remain. The latter mainly have to do with the instances and modalities of power and with the very possibility of resistance, normativity and subjectivity. Whilst many contemporary critical theorists continue to assert that there are individuals or groups with an interest in upholding socio-economic hierarchies and continue to side with the young Marx's humanistic premises, Foucault and a range of post-structuralists favour a more diffuse version of power and are opposed to humanism.

As I have intimated, Foucault does not argue that sovereign power is completely irrelevant to present day power configurations. However, his account of liberal governmentality foregoes the legal, political and economic instances that provide the conditions of possibility for the perpetuation of governmental processes. For Foucault, liberalism is more of a response to the specific needs that emerge at a certain stage of historical development, which happens to coincide with the rise of industrial capitalism. Governmentality is rather like an immaterial orchestrator of individual and collective practices, which must be known and documented but also made to converge towards keeping the population productive and happy. In this context, freedom is not so

much an illusionary endowment of abstract liberal philosophy, but is manipulated in relation to a given ratio of happiness and productivity. Whereas Marxists would contend that liberal-capitalism squeezes the life out of the population, Foucault claims that a liberal rationality uses and channels the population's life forces, whilst keeping an eye on the tolerability and effectiveness of its administrative mechanisms.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) argue that Enlightenment's promise to liberate humanity from fear and superstition through the power of reason turned into its opposite; reason was appropriated and directed towards purely instrumental ends which greatly enabled the perpetuation of capitalist exploitation. They insist that the bureaucratic state and the ever more sophisticated modes of communication and cultural production combine to impress false desires and representations in the minds of social subjects, so much so that they are no longer aware of their own subjection. Yet, in spite of the bleak picture they paint of late modern capitalism, Adorno and Horkheimer retain a philosophy of history that traces the gradual contamination of reason and believe in the neurotic's (or the alienated individual's) 'human impulse to self-reconciliation' (Honneth, 1986: 57-58). Critical theorists entertain the possibility, albeit increasingly distant, of a reflexive re-appropriation of technique and of an awareness of self-repression.

For Foucault, there is no external position from which to look at power's effects. Although Frankfurt School theorists were close to arguing that ideology had become reality, a glimmer of humanism and a faint hope that the transformative potential of technical progress would be ceased upon by the dispossessed, still remained. Foucault did not entertain such hopes and took for granted that ideology and reality had become practically indistinguishable. Accordingly, there is something paradoxical about governmentality; first, it can come close to replicating and even fetishizing reality, second, if we go a little further in Foucault's work, practices of resistance and aestheticized modes of being may become co-opted as soon as they emerge. As Hardt and Negri (2001) point out, within *Empire*, 'difference' both legitimates the cultural hold of capitalism and participates in its logic of profit. Whatever imaginative practices we may come up with are bound to be subsumed in the endlessly flexible web of liberal governmentality and of the world market. This somehow ties in with Fisher's *Capitalist realism* (2009) and with Žižek's ongoing complaint about the limits of contemporary political imagination. For Foucault, the eventual integration of pre-political struggles is an inevitable by-product of the work of power.

These two tendencies inherent to governmentality give the impression that liberalism, because of its uncanny ability to re-invent itself and to accommodate every manner of cultural and aesthetic expressions, extends onto an endless historical horizon. It is practically impossible to conceive of a more effective, intelligent and durable rationality of government. Foucault admires neoliberalism precisely because of its life-like character (2004b), and because it strips liberalism of its metaphysical shroud and abstract moralizing. A neoliberal rationality of government both connects with and produces the 'naturalness' of human endeavours and energies. It is an integrally practical philosophy. Neoliberalism is in other ways a replication of the laws of nature, and in particular of natural selection. As a rationality, it is endlessly adaptative and follows in the midst of life's transformations. Whilst this particular take on liberalism and neoliberalism is both highly original and perceptive, it is perhaps also where governmentality might be most vulnerable. In their apparent closeness to 'reality', renderings of a neoliberal rationality of

government risk doing little more than reiterating it and turning into a sort of descriptive sociology.

For Foucault, critique is ‘a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying’ (1984: 7). An ‘ethics’ or ‘care’ of the self then consists in the attentive observation and patient reconstruction of the dominant discourses and rationalities that guide our behaviour to be able to imagine new ways of being. In order to avoid the hazards of programmatic humanisms, resistance, like power itself, must be at once strategic, local, informed and measured. In this sense, critique and resistance are fluctuating modes of being that move with the constant innovations of power. For Foucault, the gradual entrance of variegated ways of being into the social purview (gay rights, women’s rights, etc.) is a more salutary and prudent ‘progression’ than a radical re-ordering of the economic system. Attuned to his surroundings, Foucault follows in the footsteps of the extra-political activism that emerges in the early 1970’s, and encourages the constant exposure of all that is arbitrary and constructed. Indeed, the post 1968 era gave way to the public and eventually political expression of marginalised subjectivities, which incidentally opened the way for a wider reception of Foucault’s work on the mad, the incarcerated, etc. The other condition of possibility for this greater diffusion was the internal collapse of the French Communist Party and the culmination of highly rigid and doctrinal currents of thought like Maoism, which made Marxism and its contemporary political expressions much less palatable. Marx’s shadow was getting dimmer by the mid-1970’s and the sheer variety of forms of subjection in the contemporary realm exploded in the light of day in myriad political struggles.

It is not that Foucault found economic inequality acceptable or unworthy of interest but rather that an exclusive focus on structural imbalances and class dynamics overshadowed the variety of forms of domination and of identities in the late modern period. A critique of the rigid identifications of class, of the disciplinary leanings of political Marxism and of the mechanistic visions of history was perhaps necessary at the time Foucault was writing. Any explanation of the remarkable durability of neoliberalism should include a study of the multiple institutional sites and attitudinal modes that carry out the general representations of acceptable and productive behaviour. The precise means through which individual responsibility, choice, competitiveness and efficiency come to be seen as necessary and valuable also have to be unearthed. Having said that, an account of the conditions that restrict existential possibilities and of the uneven character of governmentalisation throughout the world (see Joseph, 2010) remains necessary, particularly in the context of the ongoing financial crisis. Many Marxists like Fredrick Jameson, David Harvey and Slavoj Zizek have paid attention to the critiques of left politics and have been trying to accommodate the cultural modalities of neoliberalism and the various expressions of identity within a historical materialist framework. They have also reconsidered the necessity to invest conventional political structures to further their own agenda and have ceased to believe that repossessing the state is any kind of solution. A re-emergent Marxism should apply perpetual vigilance with regards to its own ends and methods.

On the other hand, the severely restricted space for agency in Foucault must accommodate the notion that basic material conditions have be met for the subject to be able to even contemplate an ‘ethics of the self’. The latter requires no less than an unmitigated access to basic means of subsistence but also to health, education and leisure. Granted, it would be wrong to impose a fixed ratio between different forms of power in a pre-determined theoretical formula.

Accordingly, two fundamental assumptions should guide the proposed combination of historical materialism and governmentality; that it varies with political and geographical context, that it does not overemphasize the sway of centralised power and that it puts in doubt the notion systematic alienation and of the corresponding reconciliation of reality and appearance.

Governmentality-Historical Materialism as critical political sociology

In contrast with most of the other attempts to combine micro-power and structural power (see for example Poulantzas (1978), Jessop (1999), Marsden (1999), Joseph (2012), this paper suggests that the philosophical difficulties involved in the combination of governmentality and Marxism are non-negligible but that ontological divergences should not deter critical theorists from exploring productive complementarities and from considering the full range of means through which neoliberalism perpetuates itself. At an elementary level, each perspective is brought in mitigate the other's weaknesses or oversights. What's more, their coming together needs to be considered in the context of contemporary events and must be based on an acknowledgement that the gap between the soundness of the Western elites' proposed solutions to the crisis and these populations' standards of living, is growing. In other words, it should have an avowedly critical aim that foregoes functionalist applications of both modes of analysis and should recognise that the current economic crisis restricts existential possibilities, an element that will presumably affect the morphology of liberal-capitalism both as a socio-economic architecture and a rationality of government. The critical theoretical model hinted at here seeks out a multidimensional approach that studies social reality in a detailed way rather than a return onto aesthetics or opaque philosophical considerations. That being said, the last section of this paper lays down some preliminary modalities for a multi-tiered and practical sociology of power.

As Foucault is often thought to have disregarded the state, it is important to mention that it remains an essential vector or relay of power and that it should feature in most analyses of contemporary politics. Indeed, as Jessop argues, the state combines, arranges, and fixes existing micro relations of power, which are then codified, consolidated and institutionalised (2007: 152). However, the state is not seen as an omnipotent and invariably wilful entity that orchestrates all forms of domination. It is rather at the confluence of a diversity of techniques of rule, disciplinary effects and normalising strategies. Contrarily to some accounts of global governmentality (see Larner and Walter, 2004), the approach suggested here is attuned to the highly uneven governmentalisation of the global sphere. Joseph (2010, 2012) argues that the extension of governmentality to International Relations is interesting precisely because it highlights significant discrepancies in degrees of governmentalisation throughout the world, which can only be explained through structural imbalances in the global economic system. In the same way, a specifically neoliberal governmentality requires that particular conditions such as an extensive administrative structure, a post-fordist economy and a varied and fast-changing consumer market, be in place for it be operative. The development of the latter conditions is greatly facilitated by the state. Even if the dissemination of ethical norms and performance standards through the ever more present and numerous agencies of international development suggests that a transnational form of governmentality is beginning to emerge, the effectiveness of advanced liberal norms depends on pre-existing dispositions to internalize the requirements set out by neoliberal behavioural and institutional models. It is often the case that governmentality is best applied to very specific regulatory regimes and to countries where the conditions are amenable to such an analysis.

Second, it confers a certain materiality to ideas. Foucault is undoubtedly influenced by Marx's materialism but intends to apply it to ideas. In a revealing interview conducted by Colin Gordon in 1978, he states that his overall intention is to provide 'a materialist history of idealities or of rationalities' (Foucault, Gordon, Patton and Beaulieu, 2012: 106). Again, he claims that the link between materialities and idealities is to be found in relations of power rather than in economic relations (Foucault, Gordon, Patton and Beaulieu, 2012: 106). Whilst Foucault was no phenomenologist, he also sought to identify the points at which subjectivity and materiality met in concrete historical settings (Foucault, Gordon, Patton and Beaulieu, 2012: 110). Ideas then orientate concrete social practices and produce, shape and transform individual subjects, social institutions and administrative rationales. Liberal and neoliberal rationalities of government are renewable collections of ideas that emerge at the intersection of philosophical and practical considerations. For example, the progressive ascendancy of neoliberalism can be partly attributed to the looming influence of Hayek and Friedman, which provide its ideal representations, and partly to the more inconspicuous modifications of welfare provisions by mid-level bureaucrats striving to attain administrative efficiency. A rationality of government, as a set of ideas and techniques, provides generalizable models of optimal behaviour, thereby contributing to sustain the overall economic structure. Here again, it must be noted that access to the material, discursive and psychological resources necessary for self-realisation under neoliberalism, is highly uneven.

Third, there needs to be a clearer integration of political economy and of the means of its social reproduction. The paper argues that governmentality is an effective theoretical tool to account for the social reproduction of capitalism. However, the precise modalities of its combination with political economy still need some articulation (although Jonathan Joseph's book *The Social in the Global* (2012) is an excellent effort in this direction). If we compare Nikolas Rose (1999) and David Harvey (2003), to name but two of the famous names from both the foucaultian and the Marxist camps, we notice that they are both looking at the transition from welfare liberalism to neoliberalism. Rose traces these transformations incrementally through an analysis of the reconfiguration of individual as well as social roles and expectations within welfare programs, policing methods, cultural mediums, etc. Harvey does it through an analysis of structural turning points in the political economy, of class re-composition (albeit with a certain reserve on the concept of class) and of the coordinated offensive on trade unions. I claim that portrayals of the transition from an industrial base to a service-based economy, the gradual weakening of trade unions, the rolling-back of the welfare state, the steady decline in salaries and purchasing power, the expansion of credit and the emergence of a global financier class from the 1970's to our day should be complemented by the more surreptitious modes of subjectification that impart the requisite individual qualities to 'succeed' or adapt in a variety of institutional settings. Social transformations cannot be grasped without recourse to the encompassing operations of power at the intersection of the everyday and the structural. Governmentality's pointed exclusions and selections contribute to identify and nurture optimal forms of life, a process that certainly has economic uses. In the end, such a framework also needs to be attuned to the consequences of structural dysfunctions and crises of capitalism on existential possibilities.

Conclusion

To fashion a critical framework that takes into account the many facets of the socio-cultural reproduction of capitalism requires some qualification and an acknowledgment of the tensions and limitations between two of the more compelling analytical perspectives on neoliberalism that

are currently available. Some adaptations of Marxism, perhaps those that are closer to critical theory and farther from purely economic readings, have certainly taken heed of the admittedly dispersed and vague phenomenon that we tend to call post-modernism. However, the dialogue between two of the more common critical currents of our day remains relatively timid, even more so in International Relations. We can only guess what Foucault's reaction to the material effects of neoliberalism would have been, but he believed that an art of the self, or any wholesome expression of subjectivity, required basic conditions of possibility, that is a certain freedom from want. This should be the primary condition for a combination of Marxism and governmentality. Equally, the notion that resistance is solely possible in the context of local manifestations of power, is insufficient.

In an interview, Foucault says; 'it is clear, even if one admits Marx will disappear for now, that he will reappear one day' (Foucault, 1999: 458). Several years later in the aftermath of the financial crisis, Marxism has regained visibility, but we would be hard pressed to say that this has been accompanied by a serious consideration of an alternative political project based on its predicates. The morphology of neoliberal government is bound to change through an internal displacement of its own constitutive practices but also through a transformation of material structures. A renovated Marxism must dialogue and engage with an approach like governmentality, which has become tremendously popular but is only just starting its own process of self-examination. Marxism itself has gone through a long and strenuous internal dialogue; it has receded and apologized for many years. Over the last few decades, it has become increasingly clear is that it must include a feminist, anti-racist, polysexual, non-essentialist and anti-authoritarian standpoint at the same time as it must expose the mechanisms of neoliberal economics and class-formation. If combined, Marxism and governmentality can provide very apt descriptions of the simultaneously fine-grained, highly differentiated and generic practices that are commonly grouped under the heading of neoliberalism.

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