Open Research Online
The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

The elusive subjects of neo-liberalism

Journal Item

oro.open.ac.uk

The elusive subjects of neoliberalism:
Beyond the analytics of governmentality

Clive Barnett, Nick Clarke, Paul Cloke, Alice Malpass

Address for correspondence:
Clive Barnett
Faculty of Social Sciences
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

c.barnett@open.ac.uk

**The elusive subjects of neoliberalism:
Beyond the analytics of governmentality**

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the degree to which conceptualizations of neoliberal governance and advanced liberal governmentality can throw light on contemporary transformations in the practices and politics of consumption. It detours through theories of governmentality, stories about consumption and shopping, and different variations on what we can learn from Foucault. We explore the degree to which aspects of Foucault's discussions of government and ethics can be put to work methodologically without necessarily buying into fully systematized theories of governmentality that have built around them. The idea that organizations and networks might share rationalities through which they problematize and seek to intervene in specified areas of social life seems worth pursuing. So too does the notion of various modes of ethical problematisation through which people come to take their own activities as requiring moral reflection. In neither case, however, can the analytics of governmentality provide a coherent theoretical account of how political processes of rule and administration work, or indeed of how they connect up with cultural processes of self-formation and subjectivity.

1). Neoliberal subjects?

In recent research in the cultural studies and the social sciences, there has been a shift towards using Foucauldian theories of governmentality to shore up neo-Marxian theories of neoliberal governance. This move is a response to a specific conceptual and empirical problem that haunts Marxian theorizations of neoliberalism and neoliberalization. On the one hand, neoliberalism is apparently a coherent, purposive programme of socio-economic and political transformation (e.g. Harvey 2005). On the other hand, the notion of a hegemonic programme generates the question of how top-down initiatives to 'neoliberalize' economies, institutions, or spaces actually work out in practice. This is where notions of governmentality come in handy, with their focus on the political rationalities which try to shape the conduct of individuals and populations to their own purposes. The convergence between the Marxian narrative of neoliberalism and Foucauldian theories of advanced liberalism is tentative and uneasy to be sure (see Fraser 2003, Larner and Walters 2004, Lemke 2002, Lemke 2003). It rests on a particular framing of how these two approaches can be combined into a coherent social theory of contemporary transformations: the Marxian account of political economic transformation and state restructuring is considered a broadly adequate description of macro-level tendencies; what is also apparently needed is an account of how these macro-level processes are connected to micro-level process of subject-formation. It is from this framing of the complimentary strengths of these two approaches that a flourishing area of research on neoliberal subjectivities has emerged. This work builds on the argument that understanding how *political-economic* transformations need to be supplemented by an understanding of the *bio-political* dynamics of market-mediated subject formation (e.g. Sparke 2006, Watts 2003). Research on neoliberal subjectivities presupposes as its starting point that programmes of neoliberal rule unfold by seeking to secure synergies between their objectives and the motivations and identifications of individuals. If there is such a thing as neoliberalism, then it is assumed that there must also be lots of neoliberal subjects being hailed, more or less successfully, to order (e.g. Bondi 2005, Gökariksel and Mitchell 2005, Walkerdine 2005).

Research on neoliberal subjectivities draws sustenance from two distinctive *method-effects* through which Foucault's ideas are instrumentalized to bolster the narrative of neoliberalization. Firstly, the assumption that neoliberalism has a guiding subject, in the form of the functional interests of Capital, empirically validated by recourse to a loose form of 'discourse analysis', in which policy documents or interviews with elites are interpreted as disclosing over-arching political rationalities or hegemonic programmes. Secondly, it is also assumed that these intentions can only come-off, or indeed be resisted, in so far as they aim to bring into existence various forms of neoliberal subject. Foucauldian notions of governmentality and biopolitics provide methodological devices through which the publicly observable rationalities, procedures and techniques of state and non-state actors can be read as proxies for processes of subject-formation. These two method-effects define a conceptual space characterized by a shared if unacknowledged functionalism. Seen from the perspective of governmentality (Larner 2000), neoliberalism is now routinely presented as a 'discourse' that constitutes practices, institutions and identities. Macro-processes of neoliberal governance are presumed to be mediated through micro-processes of calculation, regulation, and subjectification in a

formula that bears an uncanny resemblance to Althusserian accounts of ideological interpellation.

We want to question whether neoliberalism is a coherent, *ambitious* programme of rule; and whether it does aim to extend itself by bringing into existence fully-formed neoliberal subjects. We pursue this line of questioning by asking some questions about the contemporary politics of consumption and consumerism. We will flesh out the argument that by erasing from view what Sayer (2005, 5-12) calls 'lay normativity', the Foucauldian analytics of governmentality cannot actually account for the subject-effects it ascribes to governmental rationalities, and therefore cannot augment functionalist narratives of neoliberalization in the ways that is often claimed.

2). The responsibilization of the consumer

One of Foucault's most resonant ideas is that 'power' works not (only) through the restriction of liberty or freedom, but positively, by enabling certain sorts of action by subjects. In terms of the analysis of contemporary patterns of market-oriented governance and/or governmentality, this shifts attention onto the ways in which various policy initiatives seek to govern the capricious virtue of 'free individuals' (Newman 2006). Policy interventions are increasingly re-defined in terms of a shared logic of 'responsibility', in which the greater freedom ascribed to individuals as consumers in markets for goods and services needs to be balanced by efforts to instill in them greater concern to look out for their own good (in terms of health, diet, education, or security) and for various collective goods as well (such as environmental conservation, global poverty, climate change). It is less often acknowledged that this 'responsibilization' of the social field is not only the work of states, governments and policy-makers. Key actors here include capital (in the form of corporate social responsibility initiatives, for example), but also and a whole range of non-state actors such as charities, NGOs, and campaign groups. There is no single logic unfolding here, but rather a set of overlapping programmes and interests (Larner et al 2005).

The field of consumption has become central to this dispersed process of responsibilization. Nikolas Rose argues that this shift is emblematic of a thoroughgoing reordering of the ways in which political rule is exercised under advanced liberalism, a shift from governing through society to governing through individuals' capacities for self-realization. Political rationalities of advanced liberalism are now characterized by "individuals and pluralities shaped not by the citizen-forming devices of church, school and public broadcasting, but by commercial consumption regimes and the politics of lifestyle, the individual identified by allegiance with one of a plurality of cultural communities" (Rose 1999, 46). This shift has led to the suturing together of the status of citizenship with the diverse roles of being a consumer:

> "Advanced liberal forms of government thus rest, in new ways, upon the activation of the power of the citizen. Citizenship is no longer primarily realized in a relation with the state, or in a single 'public sphere', but in a variety of private, corporate and quasi-public practices from working to shopping" (ibid., 166).

The new political subjectivities emergent from the reframing of citizenship in this way are, Rose continues, linked to new practices of identity-formation:

> "These fuse the aim of manufacturers to sell products and increase market share with the identity experiments of consumers. They are mediated by highly developed techniques of market research and finely calibrated attempts to segment and target specific consumer markets. Advertising images and television programmes interpenetrate in the promulgation of images of lifestyle, narratives of identity choice and the highlighting of the ethical aspects of adopting one or other way of conducting one's life" (ibid, 178).

And all this amounts to a "new habitat of subjectification", one characterized by "the belief that individuals can shape an autonomous identity for themselves through choices in taste, music, goods, styles and habits" (ibid.).

Rose's account of advanced liberalisms' suturing together of citizen and consumer implies a shift towards a more 'ethical' mode of citizenship practice and identity-formation. 'Ethical' here refers to the active shaping of lives in relation to individuals' own sense of fulfillment, rather than by reference to models of citizenship in which obligation and prescription are the dominant registers of subject-formation. In so far as there is a contemporary trend for the politics of *consumption* to be articulated through various modes of "ethical problematisation", whereby people are expected to treat their conduct as *consumers* as subject to all sorts of moral injunctions, then Rose's account opens up a potentially creative agenda for research on citizenship and consumption. 'Mobilizing the consumer' might well have become a key aspect of current rationalities of political rule (Miller and Rose 1997). If this is the case, what this approach implies is that we should avoid simply bemoaning the death of citizenship and the eclipse of public virtue in the face of a capacious consumerism. As Rose acknowledges, governing through citizenship is inherently risky, in so far as the bearers of citizenship status are always likely to reinterpret ascribed rights and make counter-claims against those actors to whose authority they are subjected. This indeterminacy is only likely to be exacerbated when 'citizen' gets articulated with 'consumer' as a prevalent register of subject-formation. We can expect, then, that consumption is likely to be a field of intense contestation between competing rationalities of the free-market, of rights and participation, and both the hedonistic and caring dimensions of everyday consumer practice.

In what follows, we focus not on the empirical question of whether and how these rationalities play out on the ground (cf. Clarke 2004, 70-71). This would concede too much to the prevalent rendition of governmentality and its deployment to bolster political-economic accounts of neoliberalism. In the next section we want step back from consumption *per se*, and ask how the immanence of contestation to political rationalities and techniques of governing is theorized from this Foucauldian perspective. How is the possibility of projects *not* coming-off as intended allowed for in this paradigm? This Foucauldian approach theorizes this possibility in such a way that political action can only be theorized in terms of re-active behaviour; i.e., it is *only ever recognizable as resistance*. So, while the coupling of governmentality to Gramscian state theory has certainly been an occasion for more serious consideration of the variable trajectories of processes of neoliberalization (Larner 2003), the sense of difference injected into narratives of neoliberalization through the turn to governmentality still derives from a shared assumption that the dynamic of political processes is initiated from the top-down.

Partly because of the disciplinary focus of so much work on this topic, the analytics of governmentality has come to be a resolutely 'policy-centric' approach to understanding socio-cultural change. Everyday life and social relations are reduced to residual effects of initiatives emanating from dispersed, but nevertheless coherent concentrations of authority. 'The social' is defined as a fundamentally *re-active* field, rather than one from where dynamics of socio-cultural change might actually emerge. This does not only misconstrue the diverse modes of political action that might it might be possible to pursue through practices of consumption. More than this, the way in which the immanence of contestation to governmental rationalities is theorized means that this approach cannot, in the final analysis, actually account for 'success' or 'failure' either empirically or conceptually. And this might mean we need to ascribe to 'political rationalities' a more modest influence in shaping the pathways of social change.

3). Contesting governmenality

Theorists of advanced liberalism are clear that they do not suppose that governmental rationalities automatically determine subjectivities (see Dean 1999, 32). The characteristic vocabulary of governmentality theorists is testament to this: it is replete with terms such as 'elicit', 'promote', 'foster', 'attract', 'guide', 'encourage' and so on. Lemke (2001, 201) provides an exemplary rendition of this grammar and of how it pre-constructs the analysis of neoliberalism in particular ways:

> "The key feature of the neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavours to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational actor. It aspires to construct prudent subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain sort as opposed to other alternative acts".

The point to underscore is the emphasis above on a rationality that *endeavours* and *aspires* to bring about certain subject-effects. We will in due course question both the strong sense of strategic intentionality implied in this type of formulation; and also the assumption that even in so far as there is such a thing as neoliberal rationality, that it necessarily and always seeks to produce interpellative subject-effects at the level of individual persons.

Taking theorists of governmentality at their word, they only claim to be able to identify emergent rationalities and associated technologies of governing. They are not (not necessarily, anyway) assuming that these projects come-off successfully in the world. Far from it. The contestation of rationalities and technologies is clearly acknowledged by theorists of governmentality. It is not, then, the degree of closure around intended subject-effects that is the main problem with this approach; it leaves plenty of room for contestation. What is a problem, however, is the overwhelmingly *strategic conceptualization of action and interaction* through which the possibility of contestation is theorized. To capture something of what we mean by this, consider Dean's paradigmatic definition of 'government':

> Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires,

aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. (Dean, 1999, 11)

There at least three ways to parse this definition. Firstly, there is an emphasis on the multiplicity, variety and diversity of ends, means, and outcomes of government. This aspect helps to explain the wide range of fields to which ideas of 'governmentality' can be applied as a tool of analysis. Secondly, Dean claims here that government in this Foucauldian sense works through specifically 'subjective' modalities of desire, aspiration, interest, and belief. By supposing that government necessarily works through these subjective registers, Dean elides a whole set of analytical issues regarding the different relationships between the *scope* and *intensity* of modes of rule distributed somewhere along a continuum between these two poles (Barnett 2001). Thirdly, and for our purposes most importantly, it is worth emphasizing that Dean understands government as a particular type of action: it is calculated, rationalized, it seeks to shape conduct, and it is oriented by certain ends. This is the key aspect of theories of governmentality: they imagine all forms of action as primarily strategic action. When it comes to considering questions of ethics, freedom and liberty, these are still understood by reference to a quite specific notion of games, wherein the aim of the contest is "structuring the possible field of action of others" (Lemke 2002). This emphasis on strategic action overdetermines the emphasis on multiplicity, variety and diversity. It is here that the conceptual and empirical limitations of theories of advanced liberalism need to be located and subjected to criticism.

It is worth underscoring just what is meant to be distinctive about what Rose calls 'the analytics of governmentality' as an approach to understanding political power. He argues that to adopt this approach "is to start by asking what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques" (Rose 1999, 20). This focus on what authorities *wanted to happen* can certainly be a productive entry-point into researching phenomena such as administration, organizations and policy. But the analytics of governmentality is meant as more than simply a methodological approach. It lays claim to being a fully-loaded theory of the exercise of political power, one which ascribes a considerable degree of causal significance to the play between competing strategic rationalities. As such, it rests on quite distinctive philosophical foundations. The analytics of governmentality is resolutely *nominalistic* (ibid., 21). It is an approach which holds that ways of visualizing phenomena have a high degree of effectivity in actually bringing those phenomena into existence, as so many 'contingent lash-ups of thought and action'. This nominalism is, in turn, attached to a concept of governmental action as an "array of lines of thought, of will, of invention, of programmes and failures, of acts and counter-acts" (ibid.). Rose (1999, 277) spells out how the focus on the strategic dynamic of contestation and heterogeneity is meant to distinguish the analytics of governmentality from simplistic models of top-down power and bottom-up resistance:
> "There is not a single discourse or strategy of power confronted by forces of resistance, but a set of conflicting points and issues of opposition, alliance and division of labour".

So, the claim that theories of governmentality impose closure on the outcomes of programmes of rule is misplaced. However, what they certainly do is derive this stated commitment to heterogeneity and contingency from a narrowly construed conception of the variation in combinations of means, ends and outcomes.

This is one place where other uses of Foucault can usefully interrupt what has become the hegemonic rendition of the analytics of advanced liberal governmentality. One of the first attempts to think through Foucauldian notions of 'governmentality', one untouched by the systematization that this notion underwent in the 1990s, is Ferguson's (1990) classic account of development practice in Lesotho, *The Anti-Politics Machine*. There is, Ferguson reminds us, a "complex relation between the intentionality of planning and the strategic intelligibility of outcomes" (ibid., 20). At the very least, this suggests that an analytics of political power might need to look at more than just what different actors *want* to happen, and more too than how these plans are played out in a field of contestation against other actors with their own 'wants'. The focus on rationalities as the privileged entry-point of analysis might, in fact, be poorly suited to understanding the strategic dimensions of programmes of rule:

> "When we deal with planned interventions by powerful parties [...], it is tempting to see in the discourse and intentions of such parties the logic that defines the train of events" (ibid., 276).

It is precisely this temptation that the analytics of governmentality falls into, by seeing rationalities and technologies of rule as bearing a constitutive structuring influence over the subsequent realization of programmes and projects. To suppose that the observable dimension of such plans provides the key insight into the actual functioning of political processes is, to say the least, a little naïve:

> "Intentions, even of powerful actors or interests, are only the visible part of a much larger mechanism through which structures are actually produced, reproduced, and transformed" (ibid).

The analytics of governmentality only theorizes this dimension of unintended consequences in terms of interference from other strategically oriented rationalities. But there are other dimensions of action and interaction at work that are not captured by the picture of contestatory wills trying to impose their own ends on the fields of action of others.

Partly, what is at stake here is not mistaking methodological entry-points for the key causal dynamic of processes under investigation. Plans and programmes are explicit and easily comprehended, but it's always good to remember that "any intentional deployment only takes effect through a convoluted route invoking unacknowledged structures and unpredictable outcomes" (Ferguson 1990, 276). It is easy enough to read this warning as already covered by Rose and Dean's statements about heterogeneous outcomes and failure. But in both their cases, rationalities and technologies are presumed to embody a high degree of strategic directionality. Perhaps we could learn here from a bit of game theory. What the analytics of governmentality does not acknowledge is the degree to which the rationalities that govern strategic interactions are not the pre-existing properties of the different actors involved, but are an emergent dimension of ongoing interaction itself (Bridge 2005, 106-107). It is therefore not enough to simply call for more empirical

work on how governmental rationalities are played out, since this easily leads to an analysis of diffusion and resistance that leaves intact the fundamental social-theoretic assumptions of the analytics of governmentality. The idea of looking at the *emergent rationalities* of interaction would imply a different style of investigation, one less concerned with uncovering governmental rationalities, and more focused on how the concatenation of strategic interests often leads to various forms of cooperative behaviour - bargaining, helping, compromising, and self-binding (Elster 1989). But this move would require a further one: a shift away from a wholly strategic conception of action and interaction, since this conception is not able to acknowledge the capacities for communicatively mediated, normatively oriented interaction through which such emergent cooperative rationalities can develop.

Foucault's treatments of liberal contract theories and juridical models of law tended to disdain the normative dimension of liberalism as little more than a ruse, and in its place presented a vision of the social field wholly structured by competing, strategic players battling it out to impose their interests on the actions of others. Governmentality appears as a topic in Foucault's work as he moves beyond this militaristic construal of struggle (Hanssen 2000, Lemke 2002). There is a double gesture in Foucault's later work, developed in the work on political rationalities on the one hand, and on sexual practice, ethics, and technologies of the self on the other (see McCarthy 1993, 63-75). Firstly, power is explicitly theorized in ways that distinguish it from violence and domination, and refine the notion of the productive qualities of power relations. Secondly, the subject is analyzed not only in terms of subjectification, but in terms of the care of the self. However, the fundamental commitment to a strategic model of power remains intact through these developments in Foucault's later work: "Foucault's final ontology tends to equate social interaction with strategic interaction" (ibid., 63). The analytics of governmentality rests upon a conception of social interaction in terms of 'strategic games of liberty' "in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to turn to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of the others" (Foucault 1997, 299). The "action on the action of others" that defines governmentality as a distinctive rationality of rule continues to be theorized by reference to actor's efforts to determine the conduct of others, to realize their own ends through the enrolment of the strategic capacities of other actors. While Foucault certainly loosened up his sense of power in his account of governmentality, he did so only to pluralize the underlying sense of strategic action as the medium through which different actors are bound together in joint projects. He differentiated between threes senses of strategic relations: a fairly neutral understanding of means-ends relations; a sense of taking advantage of others; and a sense of obtaining victory in struggle (Foucault 2000, 346). But he endorsed the idea that these three senses covered the whole field of power relations, where strategy was understood as "the choice of winning solutions" (ibid.) in situations of confrontation or competition.

The question, then, is whether the twin moves that inaugurate the thematic of governmentality in Foucault's work - specifying the productivity of power as distinct from domination, and focusing on practices of the self as distinct from subjection - can be combined into an analytics that is capable of freeing social action from its conceptual

residualization in so much work on advanced liberal governmentality and hegemonic neoliberalism alike. In order to do so, it is not enough to affirm the creative, inventive, resistant responses of subjects positioned by overbearing discourses and technologies of subjection, particularly if this capacity is given no stronger explanation than a thinly theorized account of the vitalism of 'life itself' generating various efforts at 'de-subjectification'. In the next two sections, we want to turn back to questions of consumption and consumerism in order to suggest that the Foucauldian paradigm suffers some severe limitations when it comes to accounting for its most suggestive insights. Let us be clear, though, about where we identify these limits. It is hardly uncommon to complain that Foucault, or Foucauldian analyses more broadly, leave no normative foundations upon which to found critique. It's not clear that either Foucault or the analytics of governmentality is really vulnerable to this charge, since it might not be very well placed, in so far as critical judgment might not require secure, transcendental foundations in the first place. We want to argue, rather, that this tradition is far too averse to acknowledging the degree to which normativity inhabits the social world in various ordinarily communicative registers (see also Johnson 1997). We pursue this argument by focusing on what is most interesting about the analytics of governmentality, which is the attention it invites us to pay to *how* programmes of rule seek to bring about their ends. Drawing selectively on a larger research project on ethical consumerism in the UK[1], in section 4). we question whether attempts to govern consumption in line with principles of sustainability, fair trade, and global trade justice do aim to govern conduct through operating directly on people's desires, motivations, and beliefs. We show that the deployment of technologies of calculation in this realm suggests a much more convoluted engagement with people's conduct. In turn, we suggest that the key subjects targeted by such initiatives are just as likely to be professionals and experts as generic 'consumers'. In section 5). we turn directly to the question of how to conceptualize consumption as a realm in which people's conduct is governed 'at a distance' through the operation of norms. We develop the argument that the analytics of governmentality cannot recognize the mechanisms through which any such practice is even possible, because of a recurrent tendency to collapse the distinction between governing *action* and governing *subjectivity*.

4). Governing consumption, governing the consumer?

The contemporary politics of consumption touches on central issues in debates about neoliberalism and advanced liberalism: the relationships between states and markets, citizens and consumers; and ascriptions of responsibility amongst a range of public, commercial, societal and individual actors. We draw our examples from a specific set of campaign debates in the UK, primarily around the phenomenon of 'ethical consumerism' or 'ethical consumption'. These campaigns problematize current patterns of commodity consumption on the grounds that they are environmentally destructive, help to reproduce global inequality, and are complicit in human rights abuses (Harrison et al 2005). These campaigns are connected to, but not identical with, mainstream policy debates about sustainable consumption. In policy debates around climate change, or environmental pollution, or global poverty, it is often the default assumption that changing *consumption* requires finding ways to make *consumers* change the way they exercise choice. It also widely assumed in academic debates that rising levels of unsustainable consumption is maintained by a culture of consumerism, in which people's identities are thoroughly

invested in their status as consumers. This latter position provides a degree of critical purchase on pro-market discourses, but only by compounding the underlying assumption of those discourses, namely that peoples' identities are in fact more and more patterned after their roles as consumers. By looking at the campaigns and movements around ethical consumerism, as distinct from state-focused policy debates, we want to suggest that the assumption that governing consumption necessarily involves governing people identities as 'consumers' might be a far less obvious one than is often supposed.

One of the most productive areas inflected by theories of governmentality is research on the diversity of 'calculative practices' associated with the rise and transformation of the modern state. In his discussion of the historical significance of accounting and accountancy, Miller (2001, 239) suggests that calculative practices "alter the capacities of agents, organizations and the connections among them", and that they "enable new ways of acting upon and influencing the actions of individuals". The fundamental question left aside in this assertion is what sort of 'power' this is? How, exactly, do calculative practices enable this acting-upon and influencing? In just what sense can one think of calculative practices as aiding in the 'construction of governable persons' (Miller and O'Leary 1987)? Research on neoliberal subjectivities tends to deploy the notion of governmentality so that it appears that various practices and technologies aim to facilitate, more or less successfully, conformity to the norms of market-rule (e.g. Mitchell 2003, 200+). But if the reproduction of norms is mediated by the operation of norms, then it is far from clear that 'conformity' is the mechanism through which subject-formation could be pursued.

One way of understanding the relationship between calculative practices and subject-formation is to turn to Hacking's (2002) account of how the 'avalanche of numbers' through which modern states have categorized people since the nineteenth-century have generated new ways of 'making up people'. Systems for counting populations depend on forming categories around people, and these categories in turn help form those people themselves, in so far as they mobilize around those classificatory identities. Hacking allows a much greater degree of proactive autonomous pressure from 'below' than other Foucauldian inflected analyses. This is related to his emphasis on the variable interactions between classifications of people and the people classified, an understanding that he dubs 'dynamic nominalism' (Hacking 1999). He argues that the classification of people is shaped by various 'looping effects', through which any adjustment that people make to their own conduct as a result of being classified in new ways renders those classifications false, thereby requiring an adjustment, which generates further adjustments, and so on.

Something akin to this process is evident in contemporary ethical consumer campaigning. Calculative technologies such as surveys are important aspects of campaigning around ethical, green, and sustainable consumerism in the UK. For example, *The Ethical Purchasing Index* (EPI) is produced by the Co-Operative Bank in partnership with London-based think-tank, The New Economics Foundation (NEF). Using criteria that include fair trade, vegetarianism, organic foods, green household goods, buying locally, and responsible tourism, this annual report tracks the growth and *potential* size of the

market in ethically produced and traded goods and services. Now, what is most interesting about this type of survey data is the range of arenas in which it is deployed. The EPI attracts widespread newspaper and broadcast media coverage when published, and is part of a rolling stream of such survey research. One set of addressees for this type of survey are 'the public', and these exercises are certainly part of broad strategies of raising awareness of a broad range of 'ethical' consumption issues. Just as important, however, is the deployment of these sorts of calculative technologies to lobby government and businesses to extend support for ethical consumer initiatives. It would be wrong, then, to assume that the primary objective of these exercises is directly changing consumer's own conscious behaviour. Rather, the intention is focused on enhancing the supply of 'ethical' commodities through exerting pressure on retailers and suppliers; and just as importantly, to represent consumer choice as *political* preference in lobbying of policy makers, regulators and corporations.

These types of exercises in enumerating ethical consumerism seem to work a lot like Hacking's dynamic looping effects. Campaigns to raise awareness and encourage people to exercise consumer choice 'ethically' lead to a disparate set of purchasing acts that are classified, counted, and represented in new ways in the effort to alter retailing practices, and procurement and supply policies. In so far as these alterations take place, they in turn facilitate further acts of 'ethical' purchasing by anonymous consumers, classified and counted again in new rounds of surveying. The point is that the calculative practices involved here act on people's actions in a very indirect way - by structuring possibilities certainly, but hardly by endeavouring to transform their subjectivities as such. Indeed, and to borrow from Hacking again, looked at another way the deployment of survey data in ethical consumer campaigning indicates that, as a mode of classifying people, 'the consumer' might well be a relatively "indifferent kind", in contrast to the sorts of "interactive kinds" where there is a strong degree between classification and classified which is mediated by explicit identification with categories. Being classified as a 'consumer', ethical or otherwise, is only rarely taken up as a strong point of personal identification. This is not to say that the classification does not have effects, only that this is not necessarily mediated through strong interpellative subject-effects at all.

Our first point drawn from looking at ethical consumerism as an example of governing consumption is, then, that there is no need to suppose that efforts at shaping conduct aim to bring off strong subject-effects on individuals who identify themselves as 'ethical' consumers. Looking at *how* calculative technologies enable new ways of acting on individuals suggests that the analytics of governmentality could do well to learn a lesson from another field of research inflected by Foucault. It is in queer theory that one finds the most rigorous application of the idea that the social is not, after all, founded around stabilized notions of subjective identity (either natural or constructed), but rather that acts are constitutive of subjectivity (Seidman 1994). It is this relationship between action, identity, and subjectivity that requires more elaboration than it is accorded in the analytics of governmentality.

This leads to the second point that we want to draw from our research on ethical consumerism. Foucault suggested that 'government' takes place *between* two poles:

regulating the individual as a speaking, working, desiring subject; and regulating the 'species body', regulating whole populations. This suggests that the agents likely to be the subjects of governmental rationalities are not necessarily myriad dispersed ordinary people. In particular, professionals and experts are not just the passive agents of anonymous governmental rationalities; they are just as often the subjects of such interventions. Take the example of an innovative campaign in the UK, the Fairtrade Foundation's (FTF) Fairtrade City Campaign. The FTF certifies various institutions, including schools, churches, and Universities, as 'Fairtrade' when they attain certain criteria in terms of their supply and provisioning policies. Since 2000, this certification programme has been extended to include medium-sized towns, and most recently large metropolitan cities. Our research has tracked the year-long process in 2004-5 through which the city of Bristol in the south-west of England prepared for and successfully achieved Fairtrade City status (Malpass ++++). The Bristol FTC campaign involved an alliance between local authority departments, local businesses, and a broad network of fairtrade organizations, charities, and campaign groups. An interesting aspect of this campaign was the degree to which the main outcomes involve changes to consumption practices that go on 'behind peoples backs', as it were. The key agents in this campaign were a series of professionals in local authority departments. The campaign was initiated and driven forward by the local authority's Sustainable Development team, responding creatively to national government Sustainable Consumption initiatives by enlisting the FTC device as a means of mobilizing various local interest groups. Furthermore, some of the most active participants in Bristol's campaign, and those who were able to drive through the most tangible changes in terms of local systems of collective provision, were procurement and supply professionals working in local authority departments and in local businesses.

Bristol's FTC campaign therefore involved the creative response by local authority professionals to an initiative from non-governmental organizations (the FTF) in which the only tangible stake was gaining the kudos of being certified as a Fairtrade City; it is these professional groups who are effectively empowered by the FTC initiative. This campaign works through the mobilization of local networks of affiliation embedded in churches, unions, solidarity campaigns, and green politics, and its primary objective was to change the systems of collective provisioning of public institutions (council canteens and restaurants) and local private sector employers.

The FTC example indicates that endeavouring to govern consumption does not necessarily require direct interventions to regulate individual consumer choice at all; innovative means of transforming the collective infrastructures of individual consumption are just as likely to be the focus of programmatic interventions (see van Vliet et al 2005). This example also indicates the diverse range of subjects who can be empowered by such programmes. A fundamental determinant of the path that campaigns such as FTC takes in different places will be the degree to which different actors are able to be 'empowered' by such initiatives. Responding to central government sustainability initiatives does not involve these actors simply 'applying' a set of rules and principles handed down from above. For example, Morgan and Morley (2004) suggest that governing complex systems such as food chains requires an appreciation of the degree to which different professional

actors are able to *interpret* different rules, regulations, and policy agendas. Their point, one borne out by our own example of the Bristol FTC campaign, is not that these professional actors are mere bearers of a 'neoliberal' agenda, but that they have significant discretion for creative, pro-active interventions into the networks in which they are placed (see also Newman 2005). And the analytics of governmentality has great difficulty in theorizing this capacity for intra-organizational innovation (Newton 1998).

In this section we have suggested, firstly, that the key site of interventions into consumption are just as often the infrastructures of consumer choice as they are direct injunctions to individual consumers. These sorts of interventions aim to re-shape the 'choice sets' which mediate individual consumption behaviour (Levett et al 2003). Our second point is that these sorts of interventions aim to re-shape the *actions* of consumers, certainly, but that they might well be relatively indifferent to the subjective motivations of individual consumers. The 'ethical' ends to which many of these initiatives are oriented are, after all, shifts in aggregate patterns of consumption. By asking empirical questions about the rationalities and technologies of various efforts at governing consumption in explicitly 'ethical' or 'sustainable' ways, we have also indicated the need to be more circumspect about the general applicability of grand claims about the individualization of contemporary governance. In the next section, we want to pick up the point made above about the importance that the *interpretation* of rules and regulations plays in shaping the networks through which 'governmental' interventions play out. This sense that rules and regulations only work through the medium of interpretation cuts straight to the conceptual and empirical *aporia* around which Foucauldian accounts of advanced liberalism, biopolitics, and neoliberal governmentality turn: while they depend upon the idea that modern modes of rule operate through the distinctive action of norms (Ewald 1991), they are unable to provide an account of how this type of action can come-off successfully.

5). The ethical problematization of the consumer

Foucault's more nuanced, differentiated, but still fundamentally strategic understanding of power relations and technologies of the self underlies the distinctive problematic laid out in the analytics of governmentality. Subjectivity is no longer reduced simply to the operation of subjection. Indeed, with a nod to Habermas, Foucault proposed that the idea of 'technologies of the self' was a fourth type of technology through which human affairs could be understood: the other being technologies of production, communication and of power (Foucault 1997, 224-5). Technologies of the self are means by which to determine "the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends" (ibid, 225). The analytics of governmentality inserts itself at the intersection between technologies of domination and technologies of the self. In the process, any consideration of communicative action, which one might suppose could be important in mediating this relationship, is disallowed. Elsewhere, Foucault (ibid., 298) suggests that his difference with Habermas lies in the fact that the latter gave "communicative relations" a utopian position. This might well be true, but Foucault is in a sense guilty of the reverse error; his scruples about giving normative *foundations* for critique leads to a complete failure to acknowledge the ordinary ways in which normativity might inhabit human affairs in and through communication action. These scruples have now ossified into a pattern of mutually

reinforcing theoretical criticism, for which Foucault and Habermas have come to stand as figures.

Foucault is credited with re-theorizing power as a productive, rather than solely negative, repressive operation. He argued that relations of violence, domination, or ideology work by forcing other actors to abandon their own objectives; they repress their interests and strategies (Foucault 1986, 85). In contrast, the productivity of power involves modalities wherein one actor achieves their own objectives by structuring the field of actions through which other actors are able to pursue their own strategies. When applied to political rationalities, this idea defines relationships of 'government' as a certain sort of joint action: government works by combining the strategic interventions of one set of actors with the strategic projects of others, through the medium of norms which structure the field of action of the latter. But this is a weird form of joint action. It allows no room for communicative agreement between the parties to this combination over shared goals and objectives. It is a strangely aggregative concept of interaction, one in which the objectives that structure different actors' engagements with each other are supposed to exist as properties they hold prior to interaction itself. Power, in this account, is understood with reference to the varying success in bringing about one's own objectives. In fact, the idea that political processes are merely a set of strategic conflicts amongst competing actors is a conception not very far removed from a liberal-pluralist conception of political power (Barnett 2003, Ch.4). Honneth identifies in this concept of strategic conflict the source of the consistent elision of communicative normativity in Foucauldian analyses:

> "In a social world consisting merely of situations of strategic action, something like normatively motivated consent could in no way be formed, since after all the subjects encounter one another only as opponents interested in the success of their respective aims" (Honneth 1991, 161).

Foucault's great innovation was to identify various 'distanciated' modalities through which power relationships were played-out, not least by recasting the idea that the productivity of power worked through the generally distributed action of norms. The question therefore arises whether the Foucauldian approach can actually account for the possibility of strategically coordinated interaction mediated through the action of norms, without reducing the concept of 'norm' to just another term for an objectively recognized *rule* to which actors conform in every respect. Or, to put it another way: was Foucault really just Talcott Parsons in drag?

Reducing ordinarily communicative practices to the self-realizing force of socialization means that the normative dimension of interaction can only ever be located in various 'non-representational', habitual practices. What thereby gets lost is "a range of normative rationales, which matter greatly to actors, as they are implicated in their commitments, identities and ways of life. Those rationales concern what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not" (Sayer 2005, 6). Sayer calls these rationales 'lay normativity', and we think it is this dimension of social interaction which needs to be recovered from both the 'foundational' impulse of Habermas' search for transcendental validity conditions and the 'objectivist' impulse behind Foucault's reduction of action to the strategically governed movements of different actors. As Sayer puts it, without this

dimension, what we are left with is a picture of "bloodless figures who seemingly drift through life, behaving in ways which bear the marks of their social position and relations of wider discourses, disciplining themselves only because it is required of them, but as if nothing mattered to them" (Sayer 2005, 51).

This sense that one can only understand the relationship between individuals and wider systems of norms and regulation by taking account of 'what matters to them' is crucial to understanding the dynamics of ethical consumerism as a sub-sector of contemporary consumption practices. It is the only way to understand the responsibilization' of individuals as consumers, empowered with choice through various marketized practices of public and private provision of the means of social reproduction. If consumerism is indeed an important contemporary political rationality, then it works not through the promotion of unfettered hedonism and self-interest, but by making problematic the exercise of consumer choice in terms of various, ever proliferating responsibilities and ethical imperatives. We want now to flesh out how the notion of lay normativity can usefully supplement Foucault's notion of ethical problematisation to frame an analysis of contemporary trends in consumerism. Hacking (2002, 118) has observed that "Foucault was a remarkably able Kantian", by which he meant that there is a strong emphasis in his work on the ways in which our ethical dispositions are our *constructions*. It is this side of Foucault, as distinct from the Nietzchean emphasis on strategic conflicts of wills, that is evident in his call for a "history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self' (Foucault 1988, 13). Hodges (2002, 457) suggests that the concept of ethical problematization directs analytical attention to investigating the conditions "for individuals to recognize themselves as particular kinds of persons and to reflect upon their conduct - to problematize it - such that they may work upon and transform themselves in certain ways and towards particular goals". The sense of 'conditions' here is more agnostic than the strong sense of willful, strategic direction found in Rose' analytics of governmentality. It implies that people might make use of all sorts of resources to problematize their ethical selves, and not necessarily resources intended for those purposes at all. The notion of the ethical problematization refers our attention to the reasons and means through which people are encouraged and empowered to problematize their own conduct, to make a 'project' out of various aspects of their lives. It helps us frame our analysis of the development of policy and campaign initiatives that demand that people exercise consumer choice responsibly.

Foucault distinguished four aspects in elaborating a methodology to analyze modes of ethical problematization (1986, 26-28). Combinations of these help to constitute the aspects of our lives that our moral capacities can engage with and work on. The import of this account lies in placing questions of 'subjectivation' in a wider framework of object-choice, action, and rule-following that the overwhelmingly 'interpellative' understanding of governmentality has largely ignored. We want to use this four-way account of ethical problematisation as a heuristic with which to specify what is going on in the proliferation of discourses of responsibility and ethics around practices of everyday commodity consumption.

The first dimension of ethical problematisation is the 'ethical substance' of practices of

the self "which is the aspect or part of myself or my behaviour which is concerned with moral conduct" (Foucault 1997, 263). For Foucault, this might be one's desire, or feeling, or intentions. In the case of contemporary practices of consumption, the responsibilization of individuals involves 'choice' being defined as the 'ethical substance', that part of people's behaviour that is increasingly made the reference point for their ethical judgment. Secondly, there is what Foucault called the "mode of subjectivation": the way in which people are invited to recognize their moral obligations" (Foucault 1997, 264). What's at stake here is the precise form of the *imperative* through which ethical practice is motivated: it might be accordance with divine law, or rational universalization, or simply personal conviction. In ethical consumerism this question of how obligations are recognized seems to combine different ethical motivations, but there is a very strong emphasis on consequentialist reasoning governed by the avoidance of harm or the alleviation of suffering to distant others. Thirdly, there is 'ethical work': "the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects" (ibid., 265). This is a more practical question, and in our example, the actions through which the elaboration of ethical selves is increasingly being pursued are those very humdrum, daily activities like shopping or disposing of household rubbish. Finally, there is the *telos* of ethical practice, the kind of self that the ethical subject aspires to become through this combination of aspects. In this respect, the crucial point about ethical consumerism is that organizationally and discursively it allows for a wide plurality of ethical positions to be pursued through a range of everyday practices loosely coded as ethical.

Foucault uses this four-way division of the aspects of ethical problematisation to suggest a rough-and-ready distinction between code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities. Any 'morality', in the broadest sense, will combine these elements in different ways, but he suggested that in some, the main emphasis will be on the adherence to prescriptive codes (ibid., 29-30). In these, the 'mode of subjectivation' is predominant, and, what is more, is given a strongly prescriptive, rule-bound inflection. In others, the focus is more on self-referential principles and actions, and it is these that Foucault (and after him, writers like Rose) dubs 'ethical'. And in this sense, ethical consumerism is indeed strongly 'ethical' in Foucault's terms, as distinct from being only 'moral' in a prescriptive sense.

The notion of ethical problematisation helps us isolate the different aspects that are combined and differentiated within the broad social and cultural movement that makes up ethical consumerism. We should emphasize that its' attraction is as much methodological as conceptual - it helps us to organize empirical analysis of what is a diffuse network of actors, actions and outcomes. Hodges' elaboration of the concept of ethical problematization is of interest because he develops this idea methodologically with reference to 'positioning theory' and discursive psychology (Davies and Harré 1990, Wetherell 1998). This tradition of research lays great emphasis on the ways in which elaborations of the self work through various argumentative, rhetorical practices of *accountability*. This line of work provides important resources for both conceptualizing how ethical consumerism works as an assemblage of rationalities and technologies for the elaboration of the self, as well as providing a set of analytical resources for understanding empirical data on ordinary people's motivations for engaging differentially in various 'ethical' consumption practices. It reorients attention away from conceptual and analytical

frames that focus on how people's subjectivities are "socially construct*ed*" in a top-down/bottom-up relationship, towards a focus on how people are always "socially construct*ing*" subjectivities through ongoing joint action (Thrift 1996).

In the previous section, we argued that efforts at governing consumption do not always aim to construct the individuated consumer as the primary 'technology' for achieving their goals. Of course, we don't deny that a great deal of the contemporary problematization of consumption does address individuals. But what we do want to argue is that *how* this individualized address to choosy consumers works needs to be more carefully specified, by distinguishing between action, identity and subjectivity. In policy circles, and policy-related academic work, there is often an assumption that people's consumer behaviour can be regulated by providing lots of information about where commodities comes from, who made them, their environmental impact, their likely health impacts, and so on. The same assumption is often at work in more politicized forms of consumer activism. Academic analysis informed by cultural theory and poststructuralism would tend to see in these modes of address attempts to construct people's subjectivity by having them recognize themselves as the subjects of various images of sobriety, responsibility, commitment and so on. All of these fields - policy, campaign, and critical academic - share a rather thin, atemporal conception of the self. And in this respect, academic analysis might be lagging behind the most innovative practices of campaign groups in this sector, who are increasingly shifting away from the information-model of consumer choice towards nuanced understandings of how people integrate their actions as consumers into broader practices of accountable self-formation. For example, in the UK think-tanks such as the Green Alliance and Demos have recently argued that the key to influencing consumer choice is to better understand processes of shared learning through peer groups and social networks. This implies a focus on the "arts of influencing", identifying and recruiting 'intermediaries' in peer networks who persuade and influence others in conversation: "behaviour spreads through conversations, social learning and peer group networks", and so the aim of campaigns should be to "get people talking, inspire curiosity" (Collins *et al* 2003: 49).

We do not mean to simply endorse these sorts of formulations, but we do need to recognize here a significant shift in the way in which influential actors seeking to shape public policy debates are themselves rethinking the most effective 'technologies' for regulating individual consumer choice. These think tanks are recommending that governing consumption requires more than simply hectoring consumers to be more responsible and providing them with more information. It certainly does not involve attempts to make people conform to externally imposed norms. Rather, what is unfolding here is a sense that influencing behaviour can work through the classical arts of rhetoric. And the reason why we think this is worth taking seriously is precisely because it acknowledges that people are *argumentative subjects* through and through. This is relevant for how we conceptualize the rationalities behind the ethical problematisation of contemporary consumption, and also for how we might go about empirically investigating ordinary people's engagements with these interventions in ways that do justice to their own competencies as actors and selves, and not just subjects.

Let us return now to the theoretical terrain of advanced liberalism, governmentality, and neoliberal subjectivity. The assumption that governmentalities work through endeavouring to synergize rationalities and subjectivities betrays a careless nominalism of the self, characteristic of generic poststructuralism more broadly. It is a scholastic conceit to suppose that the 'discovery' that subjectivity is relational, perhaps even devoid of positive content, implies that subjectivities are malleable and amenable to transformation. Generic poststructuralism tends to focus on extremely thin concepts of malleable subjectivity; one thing we like about the idea of ethical problematisation is that it restores some sense of how subjectivity is embedded in broader practices of self-making and personhood. We want to follow Harré's suggestion (1991, 51) that personhood turns on a duality of the self:

> "The self of personal identity for any one human being seems to be a necessary singularity while the Selves that are manifested in social encounters can easily be shown to be diverse and actually multiple" (51).

The idea that personhood requires a sense "of being one self and continuously one self" (Mühläusler and Harré 1990, 87) does not require any supposition that this sense is anchored in a foundational identity or inner ego. Far from it, this constructivist concept of personhood opens up an alternative sense of subjectivity in terms better suited to appreciating how peoples' sense of themselves is mediated by the routinised actions and interactions in which they are implicated. For a coherent sense of personal identity to be maintained over time, in the course of changing patterns of conduct, people must be able to integrate new events into coherent narratives. The idea of the narrative-self implies that the malleability of people's subjectivity is constrained by the degree to which new events and identifications can be integrated into ongoing storylines (McNay 2000). This dimension of constraint is increasingly acknowledged by both think-tank and academic research on sustainable consumption (Jackson 2004). Consumer choice is best understood less by reference to notions of subjective motivation, and more in terms of the embedding of subjectively motivated action in patterns of practice (Shove 2003, Warde 2005). The idea of the narrative-self implies that the focus of analytical attention in understanding efforts at governing subjectivity (where this is the ambition) needs to be on the rhetorical dynamics of accountability in the company of others through which people negotiate the relationship between their routinised habits and explicitly articulated moral imperatives to consume more 'ethically', 'responsibly', or 'sustainably'.

In our research on how ordinary people relate to ethical consumer campaigns, we have used focus-group methodologies to investigate the 'lay normativities' through which people delineate the scope of activities that they are willing problematize in 'ethical' or 'moral' registers. Focus groups are not simply "a convenient way of obtaining a lot of immediately relevant on-topic talk" (Edwards and Stokoe 2004, 505); nor are they best thought of as a means of accessing 'collective representations' that groups hold. They are very good at accessing data about interaction (Kitzinger 1994, Wilkinson 1998), however, and it is this that recommends them as a means of exploring the ethical problematization of consumerism. In particular, focus group methodologies are effective at elaborating the interactive dynamics through which people negotiate various 'vertical' positionings (Davies and Harré 1990), by locating this process in the 'horizontal' practices of expressing attitudes, providing factual versions of reality, and expressing regrets and

giving justifications. The 'responsibilization' of everyday life might be as much about these 'horizontal' dynamics of social interaction as it is about 'vertical' processes of positioning by hegemonic discourses. They are, we would argue, an appropriate methodology for exploring one of the key principles of discursive accounts of the self, namely that taking-up or dissenting from positions is shaped by motivations of accountability (Wetherell 1998, 394). Below we reproduce an extract from one discussion of ethical responsibility and consumer choice amongst a group of women who all live in a middle-income residential area of Bristol. We want to use it here to illustrate how this methodological approach throws light on how to conceptualize the processes of discursive positioning through which the ethical problematisation of consumption works:

> *Facilitator:*
> *Would you ever worry about foods that are heavily packaged?*
>
> *Anne:*
> *I think part of the reason I go to a fruit and veg shop, I don't really want things that have been in a poly bag or things that have got completely excess packaging. It's ridiculous the amount of packaging you get.*
>
> *Lucy:*
> *We are meant to feel guilty about it, like it's our fault but it's not.*
>
> *Anne:*
> *But it is our fault if we choose to buy apples in a poly bag.*
>
> *Lucy:*
> *It's the people who produce it are the guilty ones, not us.*
>
> *Evelyn:*
> *At Tescos, I feel that you can't blame Tescos for knocking down suppliers, most of it's their customers that are demanding the prices are the same.*
>
> *Carole:*
> *Sainsburys, where they are doing the beans, they used to sell them all loose and they only give you the packaged option*
> *If you haven't got that choice.*
>
> *Anne:*
> *If you go to the greengrocer you get, you take your own poly bag, which I don't, but you get a poly bag, and you say 'I want those potatoes', she puts them in the bottom, and 'I want those apples', they are all just chucked in the bag, fine. That isn't anything extra at all.*

There is a common mode of analyzing talk-data of this sort in environmental studies and sustainable consumption research towards interpreting these sorts of exchange in terms of the 'vocabularies of motive' through which individuals displace responsibility away from

themselves onto other actors. From this perspective, Lucy's interventions would be read as a set of excuses for not accepting her responsibility to consume more responsibly, compared to Anne, who seems to be willing to do her bit. Our inclination is not to suppose that this type of exchange provides access to the different motivations of the individual speakers, but rather as an example of the joint action through which a set of normative injunctions are worked over and subjected to critical judgment. Wetherell (1998, 391) suggests that in talk, people "display what they know - their practical reasoning skills and competencies". This capacity for deliberative reasoning is folded into the embodied, habitual dimensions of everyday practices: people are drawn into articulating interpretations and justifications when their routine habits are interrupted or problematized (Smart and Neale 1997; see also Dreyfus and Dreyfus 2005).

This is what seems to be going on in this line of conversation. We see here people jointly considering the extent to which certain maxims do and should hold for them, by taking their ordinary practices as objects of reflection. And the positioning of subjects takes place along two planes. Firstly, for analytical purposes, the initial question by the facilitator of the group is a surrogate for a vertical 'positioning' - it addresses a normative proposition which the participants then consider through their own interaction. Secondly, this exchange is marked by disagreement amongst the participants around the implied model of appropriate response; 'horizontal' positioning may or may not generate agreement about the locus and nature of 'responsibility'. On other occasions in these sorts of discussions, it is participants themselves who 'do' vertical positioning, by introducing examples as dilemmas to be talked through by the group participants. Throughout the focus group exchanges around these sorts of topics, we find people agreeing and disagreeing, introducing topics into conversations as examples to consider from different aspects, and considering the different reasons they might have for assenting to some imperatives and dissenting from others.

We don't want to make too much of this picture of focus group participants as a collection of little Habermasians. All that these women are doing is straightforward moral reasoning: they are aligning externally addressed norms with their own frames of moral and practical reference as a pre-condition for considering their validity for them. This is a form of interactive, joint action. And it is a form of reasoning that they can, evidently, engage in. This is the theoretical lesson we want to derive from these women in Bristol discussing whether or not they should buy heavily packaged products in the supermarket. Ethical consumer campaigning works, we argue, by addressing certain moral dilemmas to ordinary people; the attitudes that people express about the topics raised by these campaigns in turn need to be analyzed in their rhetorical, argumentative context, rather than as expressions of pre-existing motivations or moral dispositions (Billig 1996).

Our reason for emphasizing this point, and for using interactive talk-data to do so, is to suggest that governing through the action of norms requires an account of how norms are acted upon that goes beyond a simplistic opposition of conformity or resistance. By definition, norms do not work by being conformed to; nor does the observation of practices that do not accord to governing norms indicate the presence of resistance (McNay 2000, ++). It is important to hold apart 'normative' from 'normalizing'. Norms do

not come with instruction labels reading "Norm":

> "since norms are not objective data, and as such directly observable, the phenomena to which they give rise are not the static phenomena of a 'normality', but the dynamic phenomena of a "normativity"" (Macherey 1998, 110).

Our reason for looking at the ordinary forms of reasoning that people deploy when confronted with demands to consume more 'responsibly' is that it helps better understand the mediums of lay normativity through which such demands operate: "There is always an element of the discretionary, elaborative, and ad hoc about how we apply rules and schemes, for they do not define their own applications" (McCarthy 1993, 30).

Norms only function as norms at all because of the capacities of people to reflect on strategies and define objectives, a self-reflexive capacity that is certainly interpretative, but above all is communicative and interactive. It is this aspect which the analytics of governmentality offers little help in understanding. Prevalent constructions of "Foucault" encourage us to presume that this dimension of interaction is misconstrued if and when it is considered as oriented by an impulse to communicative agreement rather than strategic interests. In contrast, Hacking (2002, 278) argues that "Foucault gave us ways in which to understand what is said, can be said, what is possible, what is meaningful - as well as how it lies apart from the unthinkable and indecipherable. He gave us no idea of how, in everyday life, one comes to incorporate those possibilities and impossibilities as part of oneself" (ibid., 300). These remarks come in a discussion of the complimentary projects of Foucault and Goffman. The latter, Hacking suggests, provides useful resources for understanding the ordinary 'ethno-methodical' communicative practices through which interaction is carried along, by allowing people to interpret and apply norms, to anticipate responses, to improvise, and so on. It is this dimension that the analytics of governmentality lacks. But we have argued here that it is not enough to just call for more empirical analysis of how discourses are received, since without further specification such analyses easily lend themselves to an analysis in terms of resistance and refusal. What is at stake is not just a matter of adding a bottom-up perspective to the top-down perspective of Foucauldian approaches. Serious conceptual and methodological consideration of the ordinary, lay normativities through which coherent narrative selves are sustained by negotiating various discursive positionings *supplements* rather than merely augments top-down perspectives on governmentality; i.e. it shows that what needs to be added-on to the analytics of governmentality is something missing that is really essential to the coherence of the original account itself. The overwhelmingly strategic construal of action and interaction in the analytics of governmentality cannot account for the operations it ascribes to the dynamic of strategic contestation, and this requires a reorientation of the ways in which the analysis of political rationalities and technologies of the self is formulated in the first place.

6). Conclusion

We have addressed ourselves here to a set of theoretical and methodological issues arising from the deployment of theories of governmentality as a support for narratives of hegemonic neoliberalization, using insights from research into ethical consumerism as a means of developing a critical perspective on the ways of constructing theory- and method-effects around the authoritative name of "Foucault". We have acknowledged that

there are, indeed, a set of contemporary rationalities aimed at governing consumption in relation to particular ends; that these do help sustain the 'responsibilization' of individuals as consumers; and that these rationalities might be analyzed in terms of the ethical problematisation of consumption. But our recourse to these Foucauldian motifs has also led us to question some of the basic assumptions of the analytics of governmentality and advanced liberalism. We have emphasized that governing consumption practices often does not aim to transform people's subjectivities in a very strong sense at all, but aims instead to facilitate certain types of publicly observable acts of purchase; singular acts that can be aggregated, measured, reported and represented in the public sphere. And this in turn implies that the relationship between governing actions and the formation of subjective dispositions requires more precise specification than is often provided in Foucauldian analyses. In particular, we have suggested that it requires greater consideration of narrative conceptions of the self and of personhood, in order to understand the recursive, reflexive relationships between routinised habitual practices and capacities to deliberate reasonably.

Ethical consumer movements and campaigns, we have argued, actively address people as agents of consumer choice, but not as self-interested, egoistical utility maximizes. They tell people that as consumers they are subject to a new range of moral responsibilities, but also empowered to act on these in new, innovative ways. The discursive positionings of 'consumers' in this sector work by problematizing consumption, by presenting people with dilemmas and conundrums; and they presume a capacity for ordinary moral reasoning that contemporary cultural and social theory is often loath to acknowledge. And when we turn to the ways in which people respond to these sorts of campaigns, we find people delineating the aspects of their lives that they are willing and practically able to problematize in the myriad ways that is now asked of them. When we talk to people about what they make of these injunctions to buy fairtrade coffee or organic veg or boycott Nike or recycle their beer cans or wear white wristbands, we don't find heroically 'active' or 'creative' consumers or perfectly virtuous citizens. We find people with busy lives and torn loyalties and multiple commitments and scarce resources who do what they can, and who respond positively to initiatives to make them into more 'responsible consumers' when this can be made to fit into their ongoing elaborations of the self. And these elaborations look a lot more like practical and narrative achievements of 'good enough moralities' (Smart and Neale 1997) than the circular recognition effects of post-Althusserian, post-Foucauldian, post-Lacanian theories of subject-formation.

We have argued that the Foucauldian construal of strategic interaction, by squeezing out any space for normatively oriented communicative action, cannot account for the "recurrent causal processes that govern intersections between abstract, centrally promoted plans and social life on the small scale" (Tilly 1999, 345). These include practices such as 'emulation', 'improvisation', and 'polyvalent performance' - all modes of practice which exceed simply following rules or conforming to norms (ibid., 350). Taking the 'causal power' of such interpretative practices seriously would thoroughly recast the conceptual ambitions and methodological precepts of the analytics of governmentality. It would displace attention from discovering rationalities that guide interventions onto investigating the emergent problematizations that are assembled in and through vertical

and horizontal positionings of interacting subjects. But Foucauldian theories remain too averse to treating lay normativities seriously, and therefore are unable to recognize the practical resources through which the power relations they set out to analyze actually operate. The notion of 'strategic games of liberty' was meant as a definition of how power is distinct from domination and subjection (Foucault 2000, 340). But even in its own terms, it is not at all clear that 'strategic games' are the only means of trying to influence the conduct of others (McCarthy 1993, 66). This idea appears inadequate when contrasted to notions of power which acknowledge the communicative capacity for 'acting-in-concert' free of strategic calculations of means and ends (e.g. Arendt 1958). There is no need to locate this communicative capacity in regulative ideals, or in transcendental validity conditions, nor in the habitual recesses of 'affect', in order to be able to acknowledge it as a real force in the everyday patterning of the world.

Notes
1. "Governing the subjects and spaces of ethical consumption" (RES 143250022), ESRC/AHRC Cultures of Consumption Programme.
<http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/staff/cbarnett/ethicalconsumption.htm>

References

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Barnett, C. (2001). 'Culture, geography and the arts of government', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19, 7-24.
Billig, M. (1996). *Arguing and Thinking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bondi, L. (2005). 'Working the spaces of neoliberal subjectivity', *Antipode* 37, 497-514.
Bridge, G. (2005). *Reason in the City of Difference*. London: Routledge.
Clarke, J. (2004). *Changing Welfare, Changing States*. London: Sage.
Collins, J., Thomas, G., Willis, R., and Wilsdon, J. (2003). *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Influencing public behaviour for environmental goals*. London: Demos/Green Alliance; DEFRA.
Davies, B. and Harré, R. (1990). 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20, 43-63.
Dean, M. (1999). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society*. London: Sage.
Dreyfus, H. and Dreyfus, S. (2005). 'Expertise in real world contexts' *Organization Studies* 26, 779-792
Edwards, D. and Stokoe, E. H. (2004). 'Discursive psychology, focus group interaction and participant's categories', *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 22, 499-507.
Elster, J. (1989). *The Cement of Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Ewald, F. (1991). 'Norms, discipline, and the law', in R. Post (ed.) *Law, Order, Culture*, pp. 138-161.
Ferguson, J. (1990). *The Anti-Politics Machine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Foucault, M. (1986). *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. London: Penguin Books.
Foucault, M. (1988). *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2*. London: Penguin Books.
Foucault, M. (1997). *Ethics*. London: Penguin Books.
Foucault, M. (2000). *Power*. Penguin. London: Penguin Books.

Fraser, N. (2003). 'From discipline to flexibilization? Re-reading Foucault in the shadow of globalization', *Constellation* 10(2).

Gökariksel, B. and Mitchell, K. (2005). 'Veiling, secularism, and the neoliberal subject: national narratives and supranational desires in Turkey and France', *Global Networks* 5(2), 147-165.

Hacking, I. (1999). *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Hacking, I. (2002). *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Hacking, I. (2004). 'Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: between discourse in the abstract and face-to-face interaction' *Economy and Society* 33, 277-302.

Hanssen, B. (2000). *Critique of Violence*. London: Routledge.

Harré, R. (1991). 'The discursive production of selves', *Theory and Psychology* 1, 51-63.

Harrison, R., Newholm, T., and Shaw, D. (2005). *The Ethical Consumer*. London: Sage.

Hodges, I. (2004). 'Moving beyond words: therapeutic discourse and ethical problematization', *Discourse Studies* 4, 455-479.

Honneth, A. (1991). *The Critique of Power*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Jackson, T. (2004). *Motivating Sustainable Consumption: a review of evidence on consumer behaviour and behaviour change. A report to the Sustainable Development Research Network*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Johnson, J. (1997) 'Communication, criticism, and the postmodern consensus: An unfashionable interpretation of Michel Foucault', *Political Theory* 25, 559-583.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). 'The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants', *Sociology of Health and Illness* 16, 103-121.

Larner, W. (2000). 'Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmentality', *Studies in Political Economy* 63, 5-26.

Larner, W. (2003). 'Neoliberalism?', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21, 509-512.

Larner, W. and Walters, W. (eds.) (2004). *Global Governmentality: Governing international spaces*. London: Routledge.

Larner, W., Le Heron, R., and Lewis, N. (2005). 'Co-constituting 'After Neoliberalism': Globalising governmentalities and political projects in Aotearoa New Zealand', in K. England and K. Ward (eds.) *Neoliberalization: States, Networks, People*.

Lemke, T. (2001). 'The Birth of Bio-Politics: Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality', *Economy and Society* 30, 190-207.

Lemke, T. (2002). 'Foucault, governmentality and critique', *Rethinking Marxism* 14:3, 49-64.

Lemke, T. (2003). 'Comment on Nancy Fraser: Re-reading Foucault in the shadow of globalization', *Constellation* 10(2).

Levett, R., Christie, I., Jacobs, M., and Therivel, R. (2003). *A Better Choice Of Choice: Quality of life, consumption and economic growth*. Fabian Policy Report 58. London: Fabian Society.

Macherey, P. (1998). *In a Materialist Way*. London: Verso.

McCarthy, T. (1993). *Ideals and Illusions: On reconstruction and deconstruction in contemporary critical theory*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

McNay, L (2000). *Gender and Agency*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Miller, P. (2001). 'Governing by Numbers: Why Calculative Practices Matter', *Social*

Research, 68:2, 379-96.

Miller, P. and O'Leary, T. (1987). 'Accounting and the construction of the governable person', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 12(3), 235-265.

Miller, P. and Rose, N. (1997).'Mobilizing the consumer: assembling the subject of consumption' *Theory, Culture and Society* 14, 1-36.

Mitchell, K. (2003). ' Educating the national citizen in neoliberal times: From the multicultural self to the strategic cosmopolitan'

Mitchell, K. (++++). 'Neoliberal governmentality in the European Union: Education, training and technologies of citizenship', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*.

Morgan, K and Morley, A (2004) 'Creating Sustainable Food Chains: Tapping the Potential of Positive Public Procurement', in M. Thomas and M. Rhisart (eds) *Sustainable Regions*. Cardiff: Aureus Publishing.

Mühläusler, P. and Harré, R. (1990). *Pronouns and People: The Linguistic Construction of Social and Personal Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Newman, J. (2005). 'Enter the transformational leader: Network governance and the micro-politics of modernization', *Sociology* 39, 717-734.

Newman, J. (2006). 'A politics of the public', *Soundings* 32, 162-176.

Newton, T. (1998). 'Theorizing subjectivity in organizations: The failure of Foucauldian studies?', *Organization Studies* 19(3), 415-447.

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sayer, A. (2005). *The Moral Significance of Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seidman, S. (1994). 'Sociology/Queer Theory', *Sociological Theory* 12:2, 166-177.

Shove, E. (2003). *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: The social organization of normality*. Oxford: Berg.

Smart, C. and Neale, B.(1997). 'Good enough morality? Divorce and postmodernity' *Critical Social Policy* 17, 3-27.

Sparke, M. B. (2006). 'A neoliberal nexus: economy, security and the biopolitics of citizenship on the border', *Political Geography* 25, 151-180.

Thrift, N. (1996). *Spatial Formations*. London: Sage.

Tilly, C. (1999). 'Power – top down and bottom up', *Journal Of Political Philosophy* 7, 330-352.

Van Vliet, B., Chappells, H., and Shove, E. (2005). *Infrastructures of consumption: Environmental innovation in the utility industries*. London: Earthscan.

Walkerdine, V. (2005). 'Freedom, psychology and the neoliberal worker', *Soundings* 29, 35-46.

Warde, A. (2005). 'Consumption and theories of practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5:2, 131-154.

Watts, M. (2003). 'Development and Governmentality', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24, 6-34.

Wetherell, M. (1998). 'Positioning and interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue', *Discourse and Society* 9, 387-412.

Wilkinson, S. (1998). 'Focus groups in feminist research: power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning', *Women's Studies International Forum* 21, 111-125.