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John Clarke

Forthcoming in Kendra Coulter and William R. Schumann (eds.) *Governing Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Political Labor, Power, and Government*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

As the editors have argued – and the authors have demonstrated – work is all too often missing from analyses of politics, government and governing. Redressing this absence is not, of course, merely a matter of filling in a gap, just adding work to an already rich but stable mixture to add a little texture or colour. On the contrary, making work visible demands a change in the analytical landscape. Certainly the absence of work as a focus of attention has produced some perverse effects. In its absence, we are treated to analytical short circuits (in which studies jump from intentions to effects); the recycling of black box models of government and governance (you put your project in here and the results come out there...) or what Tara Schwegler nicely describes as a willingness to believe in the ideal type of a hierarchical, rational bureaucracy. Each of these leaves us with a very functional account of the *machinery* of government as an apparatus that processes ideas, intentions, interests or ideologies and delivers the desired results. In their very different ways, the chapters collected here make visible the work that is a necessary condition of governing. They reveal very different sorts of work through which the attempt to govern passes – and which, like all other forms of human labour, involve practices of transforming things. Whether the objective is to govern populations, projects, problems or processes, work (and people to do the work) is essential. Forms of work (and types of worker) are a condition of possibility: that populations might be regulated; that projects might materialize; that problems might be resolved or that processes might run smoothly. But – as the chapters also demonstrate – these forms of work are also the condition of other possibilities, in which the anticipated or desired outcomes do not materialise. In analysing political programmes, ideological schemes or governmental strategies we need not to mistake the fantastic projections of those who would rule for their real effects. In preventing such analytic short-circuits, attention to the work of governing is vital.

Varieties of labour

The chapters collected here demonstrate the diversity of forms and sites of labour that are involved in the work of governing. I doubt whether even this rich array exhausts the possibilities and I want to begin by sketching a map of the salient forms of labour that might be required to govern. This is by no means a definitive statement, rather I want to draw particular attention to the forms of labour that are connective and transformative in processes of governing. They are connective of politics, people, policies and places and they (aim to) transform existing configurations of those elements into new alignments. The starting point is the most recognisably ‘political’ forms of labour – those involved in mobilising or *articulating political blocs*. To become politically dominant, much less hegemonic, alliances must be built and stabilised: different identities and interests must be negotiated and reconciled into an apparent ‘common interest’. Articulation here marks a double process of connection: the work of joining together different social groups and the work of bring them to

voice or speaking 'in their name' (Hall, 1989; Slack, 1996). There are two other points about this sort of labour to note. First, it is on-going labour: blocs or alliances are never permanent. They are fractious and have the potential to fracture or re-form, such that the work of renewing, maintaining and repairing is continuous. Second, as Poulantzas (1978) once observed about the work of the capitalist state, this sort of political labour is always both connective and dis-connective; both mobilising and de-mobilising social forces. In the present, this issue of dis-connection and de-mobilisation takes on increasing significance as ruling blocs try to find ways to impede actual and potential forms of activism (as Hyatt's chapter indicates). Preventing social forces from becoming political forces is a critical, if often less visible, aspect of political labour.

The second type of labour in my map involves the work of *assembling projects* that define the direction and purpose of governing. By this I mean something more than defining the programme of a ruling political party, an understanding of political projects that I borrow from Evelina Dagnino's work on Latin-American politics (e.g., 2007). Political projects usually involve parties (or coalitions) but involve other agents and agencies within and beyond the state. Equally importantly, projects refer to the imagined purposes of ruling: the ideas, ideals and desires that provide a sort of coherence and sense of direction for political action and the work of governing. I stress 'a sort of coherence' because there is nothing that requires political projects to be *intellectually* coherent. On the contrary, the building of blocs and alliances, the negotiation of different interests and identifications and, indeed, the contradictoriness of the world to be governed combine to suggest that rigorous intellectual coherence is probably the least significant criterion for assessing political projects. But nevertheless, a sort of coherence is important for the performative work of political projects to inspire confidence, belief and support (particularly in the realm of mass-mediated political culture). Nevertheless, the stress on the work of assembling projects points to the heterogeneous sources, resources, desires and aspirations that may be combined in the making, maintenance and subsequent revision of a project.

Third, I think it is important to consider the work of *inscribing policies* as a process of translation between the desires or ambitions of a political project and the institutional terrains of the apparatuses of governing. I have emphasised the work of inscribing (rather than the more conventional conception of policy making) to capture something of the sense of Dorothy E. Smith's conception of texts as 'key to institutional coordinating, regulating the concerting of people's work institutional settings in the ways they impose an accountability to the terms they establish' (2005: 118). Policies are inscribed in texts, and those texts inscribe expectations, orientations and obligations in the institutional environments in which they circulate. But I also understand these processes as involving translation: a practice that is both connective and transformative (see also Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). Subsequently, of course, policies are subject to further translation as they move from founding texts to guidelines, schemas and forms and become enacted in everyday practices in specific locations.

This issue also points to the fourth form of labour that is significant for my map: the labour of *enacting government*. By this I mean to refer to all those many labours of doing the daily business of governing: whether in the corridors of senates and parliaments and head offices of departments of state, or more voluminously in the

dispersed outposts through which projects are turned into practices. The minutiae of daily encounters – what Painter (2006) has called the prosaic practices of governing – are significant in many ways. They are where people encounter government, are ‘touched’ by the state, and are recognised (or not) as citizens. Of course, these quotidian labours are immensely diverse and dispersed. They are also performed by many different sorts of workers, who may themselves be more or less formally ‘governmental’ in terms of their role and employment contract (Sharma, 2006). From the (subcontracted) border control official to the worker holding up a sign to stop traffic at some road works; from the teacher inculcating civic values to the prison officer locking the cell door; from the nuclear engineer stabilising the plant to the official spokesperson explaining the plant’s closure; and from the vaccinating nurse to the labour market activator: the daily business of governing takes myriad forms. But despite their dispersed diversity, they are also a key part of how government is perceived, experienced and comprehended. In subsequent sections, these observations will lead me in two rather different directions; on the one hand, it is important to think a little further about those who perform the work of governing; on the other, these issues point to questions of how to understand governing work in terms of governments and states.

However, I turn first to a recurrent image about governing work – the idea of performing. This links several of the types of work I have sketched here: the work of representation in building blocs or alliances; the projection of desired or desirable futures in political projects; the inscription of policies and the work of enacting government all have aspects of performing. I mean the term in its dramaturgical or theatrical sense, rather than the instrumentalised sense of organizational ‘performance’ that is assessed, evaluated and managed in contemporary models of public governance (although the two are connected, see Clarke, 2005). At the most general level, governments have to perform being governments for a range of audiences, located in different settings and formed in different relationships, demonstrating their competence and capacity. They must perform for domestic/electoral audiences – the ‘people’ in their more or less complex and inclusive forms. They must perform for audiences made up of other states in the field of international and inter-governmental relations (of conflict, collaboration and competition). They also have to perform for an increasing array of regional and supra-national organisations and agencies (from the European Union to the International Monetary Fund or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) that assess, evaluate and compare governmental performance. And they must perform for national and transnational formations of capital (who do not necessarily share a common point of view from which to evaluate these performance). Finally, they must perform for audiences composed of diverse groups of mobile and transnational people, ranging from the corporate ‘business class’, through tourists, to migrants (who may all evaluate and compare the performances of several governments on their travels). William Schumann’s chapter here indicates some of the tensions at stake in representing the nation and the government to different audiences who may have distinct points of view and criteria of judgement.

So, governments need to perform like governments, and this increasingly involves performing ‘performance’ – as something to be measured, managed and evaluated (thus creating new forms of governmental work: inspecting, auditing, measuring and data management). To mix metaphors: performance is an international currency,

valorised by competitive comparison between states, for example in education 'league tables'. It is a currency that can also be spent in the local markets (particularly electoral ones) by demonstrating comparative standing or improvement. At the same time, the performance of performance is a reminder that states are not monolithic blocks, particularly in the context of dispersed governance or management arrangements. They are ensembles or assemblages of structures and relationships, processes and practices. The pressures to 'perform' bear differently on different elements of these ensembles: service providers need to achieve high standards of 'delivery'; partnerships need to demonstrate the results of 'joined up working', and governments need to perform 'effective' or 'modern' governing (see Pollitt and Hupe, 2011, for some of the language through which government is currently performed).

Finally, I think that all these varieties of work (and the different sorts of performance that governing entails) must include versions of Tara Schwegler's 'political work' of scanning, analysing and decoding the environments in which the work of governing is taking place. Certainly different environments will contain different sorts of signs and signals and actors will be attentive to particular manifestations of interests and powers, and of micro and macro political alignments. So too, the devices and code books that they use to make sense of such environments will vary. But it seems impossible to be engaged in the work of governing without such concerns and practices.

What about the workers?

Paying attention to work also implies considering those who perform the work. These are not just 'hands' or 'bureaucratic functionaries' but need to be understood as having social characters, positions and dispositions that are formed in social relationships and trajectories. As Kendra Coulter's chapter indicates, these workers are, among other things, gendered. They work in governmental milieux that are gendered and engage in the business of governing gender as part of the social order. Meanwhile, Ilana Gershon's chapter suggests that we should be attentive to the ways in the work of governing may also be racialized and ethnicized and indicates something of the changing political-cultural registers through which formations of race/ethnicity can be represented. The Weberian concept of the government worker as bureaucrat (and more popular images of such workers as 'faceless bureaucrats') suggest a sort of absence or effacement of social marking, but the practices of governing both work with marked subjects and work on social marking (reinforcing, reinscribing or sometimes redressing forms of division and inequality). For these reasons, both political and governmental offices have been the focus of challenges focussed on their social representativeness: most obviously on the terrain of gender and race/ethnicity. The political claim that government should 'represent' the society that it administers in ways that run beyond conventional political notions of representation has been a focus of much contestation – both in the struggles for equality claims and in their management as rules, procedures and conflicts within public administrations.

Such challenges provide one specific example of a much wider set of issues about changing forms, sites and process of labour in governing. We might add a variety of others, beginning with changing techniques and technologies of governing, such as the impact of information technologies on what governments can know and on how

they interact with or encounter their publics (e.g., Budd and Harris, 2008; Dunleavy et al., 2006). Labour processes have changed to accommodate more ‘therapeutic’ orientations and practices in activities related to social work or the development of ‘personalised’ forms of case management ranging from active labour market policies to customer choice in public services (Clarke et al., 2007; Schram, 2000; van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007). A whole variety of sites and practices have grown up to meet the demand for more consultative, participatory or co-production arrangements between government and citizens, involving new techniques and tools, and well as new types of governmental worker. In other settings, the enlargement of surveillance, policing and security/safety orientations have enlarged the reach of some state apparatuses (prisons, police, etc), created new types of work and worker (community safety officers in the UK, for example) and enrolled ‘communities’ into the business of safety and security (e.g., Crawford, 2006; Gilling and Hughes, 2002; Stenson, 2008; Ruben and Maskovsky, 2008). These changes have also involved the reworking of the government-citizen or state-society relationship as functions, responsibilities, roles and labour change their location. What was once part of government is now sometimes performed by non-governmental agencies (NGOs) or quasi-governmental agencies (QUANGOs), or government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs).

Such boundary changes also bring new forms of work and new types of worker with them. Sometimes they are associated with (or invested with) governmental authority and status; at other times, they gain their standing precisely by being not governmental (instead ‘being close’ to the people/the community/the user etc). In still other instances – particularly contracted or marketised forms of public service provision – organisations and their labour processes are authorised by being not public bodies, but instead imagined as innovative, efficient, dynamic and businesslike because of their private/corporate character. Sharma has pointed to some of the ambiguities and tensions associated with these shifting forms of organization and work that are both inside and outside of government, drawing on a study of a empowerment-focused development programme for rural women in India:

This neoliberal shifting of responsibility for governmental functions, such as development programs, to rapidly multiplying quasi- and nonstate entities in the Indian context, however, is partial. The examples above show that these processes do not imply independence for nonstate actors but point instead toward these actors’ increasing entanglement within the webs of governance as instruments and not just targets of rule. Moreover, the postcolonial Indian state cannot completely privatize governmental functions such as development that are an inseparable part of its identity. The implementation of empowerment programs by semigovernmental bodies perhaps allows for a reconciliation between the developmentalist and neoliberalizing facets of the Indian state, enabling the state to continue to perform its legitimizing development duties by building the capacities of various actors to ensure their own basic needs. The state can thus appear to become smaller and cut its social-sector budget while still not abandoning its development role. (2006: 79-80)

She combines this with an analysis of the gendering of the programme (in both its workers and its targets); the political complexity of its conceptions of empowerment and the forms of gender typification of power, authority and the state (Sharma, 2008).

This is an exemplary instance of how the ethnographic moment can illuminate the multiple dynamics at stake in the work of governing and it points me towards my next set of concerns. Sharma's study (like others) reveals that the grand plans of political projects may not translate coherently and successfully into practice. On the contrary, the 'translation' of empowerment in Sharma's study involved different political and cultural inflections and unruly practices in relation to existing structures of power and inequality. Workers (wherever they may be located in the apparatuses of governing) have often proved to be unreliable – and their unreliability has the effect of generating other forms of work to scrutinise, oversee, regulate or direct them.

Unreliable labour

Unreliable workers are not, of course, an exclusive feature of governmental labour. On the contrary, most sites of labour appear to have had trouble with workers who fail to perform as required. Much social science in the fields of work, industry and organizations has been engaged by this problem of unreliable labour, whether addressing how to explain it or how to overcome it. The conventional answer tends to involve either better machines (involving what Marx called the real, rather than the formal, subsumption of labour) or better management. Both strategies are visible in the work of governing, particularly in the guise of the New Public Management. Indeed, changes in the organization and labour processes of governing have often involved a demand for 'more and better management' (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

In the work of governing, however, this unreliability of labour takes on an extra dimension, since it affects the delivery of political and/or governmental projects. Indeed, there is a distinctive history of research and writing that addresses some of these labour problems: the discretion-exercising 'street level bureaucrat'; the unpredictable 'mediating professions' of public services; or the oscillation between the rule-bound and rule-bending public servant (e.g., Lipsky, 1980; Johnson, 1973; Barnes and Prior, 2009). I want to contrast this view from policy studies and organizational and occupational sociology (see, for example, Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collison and Ackroyd, 2005) with the view of subject constitution in governmentality studies in which the effectiveness of the subjectifying strategy tends to be assumed. That is to say, the careful attention to governmental strategies, discourses and summoning of subjects is rarely matched by enquiry into whether the subject – in this case the governmental worker – being summoned materializes in practice. At least, I wish to suggest the sociology of work suggests a complicated field of compliance, recalcitrance and resistance that escapes the characteristic Foucauldian binary of Power and Resistance which tends towards a relatively hydraulic view of their coupling. Power always implies Resistance and vice versa: 'In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal. At every moment the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries. Equally, the relationship between adversaries in society may, at every moment, give place to the putting into operation of mechanisms of power' (Foucault, 1982: 208.).

I would want to multiply this dynamic (because particular subjects are, in practice, the focus of many simultaneous subjectifications) and insert a temporal problematic into the analysis of the moment because people always bear the traces of previous subjectifications and their responses to them). Such a complex view of subject

formation leads to a further question: what resources – discursive, cultural, material, relational – are available to people as the means of resistance to a specific subjectification or governmental strategy? How do they draw on things from one place to act in another? For me, this suggests a move from Foucault’s problematic to Bakhtin’s dialogic/heteroglossic view of social and political relations and practices (see Holland and Lave, 2001 and Clarke et al., 2007, for example).

Nevertheless, Foucault’s work points to the importance of thinking agency – the capacity to act – in situational or contextual terms rather through abstract formulations of structure versus agency. In Foucauldian terms, agents/subjects are *specifically* empowered: they are offered particular capacities to act in determinate settings and to understand themselves as this particular sort of subject (who can choose how to exercise these particular capacities). That is, Foucault’s anti-humanism leads him to avoid the structure-agency distinction by insisting on a radically particular view of the agent/subject. I think this marks a critically important departure point for thinking about agency – and in particular the recalcitrant or resistant worker – from which we should not retreat. But it does need to be developed in ways that are concerned with plural or, more accurately, heterogeneous subjects who stand at the intersection of multiple agency producing contexts.

A view of agency as contextually animated would give greater attention to the web of relations in which people are (multiply) located, as does Kim Clark’s examination of midwives recruited to governing in Peru. Some of these contexts are governmental in the Foucauldian sense but some are not: Foucauldian actors often seem strangely a-social, lacking any visible markers (or effects) of their place in the contested and antagonistic field of the social. A more radically contextual view might make such relations more visible as part of the ways in which agency is solicited, enabled, constrained and – sometimes – repressed. It might also make agents look like specifically embodied actors. In effect, I think the Foucauldian model has perversely produced an interest in singularities (governmentalities, discourses, strategies, sites etc) rather than attending to the dynamics of multiplicity and heterogeneity. A similar argument has been made, from a different starting point, by O’Malley, Weir and Shearing:

The lack of attention to social relations occurs by epistemological design, not by accident. It is a problem at the level of its theoretical object, 'mentality of rule', that has led governmentality studies to be insensitive to social variation and social heterogeneity. In this we refer not only to recognition of the multiplicity of voices and discourses subject to government but not aligned with it, but equally to the multiplicity of voices within rule itself. (1997: 504-5).

This might lead us to a view of agents and agency as always produced in multiple, hybrid, compound and potentially contradictory formations (Newman and Clarke, 2009). Specific settings are then traversed by different ‘logics’ that produce particular forms of indeterminacy that require agents to resolve the tensions, paradoxes and contradictions or to do the work of translation from one form to another. In such settings, there are expectations that some logic, code or personal quality will enable the agent to ‘do the right thing’. Nevertheless, as the Pirates of the Caribbean knew perfectly well, such logics or codes are ‘more like guidelines, really’, enabling a

degree of flexible interpretation.

I think it may be worth teasing out different contextual conditions of such flexibility of interpretation (since it underpins so much of the work on 'street level bureaucrats', for example). The first and simplest form is that strategies, policies, guidance are often (and necessarily?) underspecified in relation to the situation they attempt to govern, such that front line workers have to produce the fit between rules and cases. A second form may be where competing and contradictory logics attempt to rule a site of practice, such that front line actors have to work out the balance between different guidelines or injunctions (e.g., satisfy the customer versus control costs). This may also be the form taken by tensions between organizational and occupational logics, where organization specific demands conflict with professional judgement, for instance. Front line workers – and those at other organizational tiers – are rarely 'just' workers. Here, too, is the problem of what Johnson (1973) referred to as the 'mediating professions' typical of public services whose work is always framed by the potentially conflicting demands of their organization (and the state policies it enacts) and those of the public/users/clients of the service.

Finally, I want to insist that other contexts may animate the forms and practices of agency that actors engage in. The multi-contextuality of individuals and groups may enable them to perceive connections, disjunctures, possibilities and problems in ways that could not be imagined if they occupied only a singular location. To put it another way, what is it that informs the choices of 'street level bureaucrats' when they are exercising 'discretion' and making policy in practice? Social and political, rather than organizational or occupational, resources may inform choices and action: so discretion might be conditioned by ethical judgements (e.g., about solidarity or obligation), by cultural judgements (e.g., about gender or racial differences) that may be assembled in unstable combinations of occupational/professional/political/cultural elements (think about religion-inflected professional case work with same sex households, for example)

I realize that this is a rather abstract discussion of the problem of unreliable workers. But the Foucauldian concern with the 'conduct of conduct' offers some fertile starting points for thinking about the problems of control and conflict in contextualizing ways. Like others in this collection, though, I think the starting point should not be mistaken for the destination. We need to be attentive to the failures of projects, strategies and attempts to manage governmental workers. For example, in their chapter, Smart and Smart argue that:

The anthropology of government must pay attention to the governed as well as the governors. Governments use bureaucracies and new techniques to shape the conduct of members of a population, but may not require panoptic strategies. Classic liberal political philosophy foresaw projects to make the nation or the city "the milieu for the regulation of a carefully modulated freedom". By acting on the inherent dynamic forces of urban life, it became possible to "govern *through* rather than *in spite* of individual liberty"(Osborne and Rose 1999: 738). Liberties are taken other than those encouraged by government, so consequences may not be those intended by programmers. To understand the

outcomes of liberalism, or neoliberalism, we need double vision, from the bottom up as well as from the top down. (*Page Reference*)

The work of governing is captured in this double vision: it is a site of success or failure as a site of subjectification (producing reliable workers). It is also the means of attempting to realise governmental strategies, with uncertainty about their success or failure. Small wonder that it has been the focus of waves of reform that seek to make it more efficient and effective. These create new forms of work, new sites of work and new labour processes (and managerial direction of those processes). Such reforms are closely associated with the contemporary problem of how to describe the institutional locations of the work of governing.

The Gov-complex

As doubts about the state proliferated – both in everyday politics and in social and political theory – a series of words built around the root ‘gov’ have become increasingly significant. Government, governing, governance and governmentality point to both the importance and its difficulty: just what are we naming with any of these terms? *Government* has acquired a rather old-fashioned air, even though we still refer to governments as agents. But government understood as an institution, or even as the practice of governing, has given way to other terms, both in the academy and in governmental circles (see Pollitt and Hupe, 2011). Concepts of *governance* have been central to shifts in political science and studies of public policy, administration and management. The dominant theme has been the shift from ‘government’ (the practice of politics, policy and administration in the state-form) to ‘governance’ (the result of co-production by many agents and agencies). Governance implies, at least, the permeability of states as institutions; the plurality of agencies involved in governing; and is often understood as involving a shift away from hierarchical, authoritative or bureaucratic forms of social coordination towards the modes of markets and networks (see, for example, Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1997; Pierre, 2000 and the discussions in Daly, 2002; Newman, 2001 and 2005; and Walters, 2004). To the extent that governing increasingly engages non-state agencies (private and voluntary sector organisations) or summons individuals, households and communities to ‘take responsibility’ for their own well-being, governance points to significant tendencies. There are, however, some conceptual difficulties associated with governance. It retains an institutionalist view of agencies and practices and has some problems with the persistence of the state (not least as a site of what Jessop, 2000, calls ‘meta-governance’). Finally, reflecting its political science and public administration origins, it typically operates with a ‘thin’ conception of the social.

The rise of *governmentality* as a key concept also marks a de-centring of the state (e.g., Dean, 1997; Petersen et al., 1999; McDonald and Marston, 2006; Rose, 1999). Drawing on Foucault’s fascination with ‘the conduct of conduct’, governmentality studies have opened up the analysis of policy in profound ways – simultaneously proliferating the sites and forms of agency involved in governing and linking the micro-politics and practices of such agencies to the larger ‘mentalities’ of governing, primarily those of liberalism and its variations (classic, expansive and advanced). Governmentality is also not without its problems: for example, the difficulty of combining the heterogeneity of micro-political analyses with a tendency towards ‘epochal’ analysis of liberal governmentality and its phases/forms; or its separation of

European liberalism from its constitutive colonial conditions. As suggested in the previous section, there are also some questions about assuming the ‘success’ of governmental projects in practice. These problems in no sense deny the productive impact of ‘governmentality’ as an analytic framing for studies of states (e.g., Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Sharma and Gupta, 2006); of neo-liberalism as a distinctive political rationality and form of governing (e.g., Brown, 2005; Kingfisher, 2002); of formations of global governmentality (Larner and Walters, 2004) and of the practices, strategies and failures of governmental projects (Li, 2007; Smart, 2006).

For me, though, *governing* more helpfully denotes a troubled and turbulent set of relationships, processes and practices that were once rather more comfortably identified as the state. Declining political enthusiasm for states, the proliferation of agencies and apparatuses performing governmental work within and beyond the nation-state, the fragmentation of the monolithic image of the state and the concurrent rise of markets, communities and civil societies as the sites of engagement and coordination have all brought states – and state-centric theorising – into question. As with many other epochal statements, the ‘death of the state’ has been overstated and rather misses the point of some of the reconfiguration and refurbishing of states (Sharma and Gupta, 2006). Nevertheless, this unsettling of the institutional, discursive and conceptual centrality of the state points to a more dispersed ensemble or assemblage of apparatuses, personnel, and practices. I have been very influenced by Davina Cooper’s innovative use of the concept as the basis from which to explore particular conflicts over authority, ownership and belonging, involving heterogeneous social forces and divergent conceptions of the right to govern (1998). Framed in this way, ‘governing’ appears less subject to existing intellectual ownership claims and conceptual belongingness than either governance or governmentality. More importantly, it enables an engagement with different sites, apparatuses, policies, and practices. However, it leaves a question about how to conceive of this field of heterogeneous sites, apparatuses, policies, people and practices in which the work of governing is carried out. Cooper herself connects her concern with governing with a complex ‘conception of the state’:

My conception of the state as a set of articulated identities shares with other approaches a conceptual emphasis on the interrelationship of force, political and regulatory power, dominant social relations and institutional structure. ... However, how a state functions, in particular, how the western, liberal state actually functions – its relationship to accountability, legitimacy, and authority, for instance – is more contested (1998: 9).

This is important because the state continues to exercise a certain sort of fascination in both theory and practice. Akhil Gupta has argued that attention to instabilities and disjunctures may enable us to escape the forlorn debate for or against the ‘disappearance of the nation-state’. This binary choice, he suggests, may be missing the point because ‘one can often point to persuasive evidence that leads to *both* conclusions for the *same* cases’ (1998: 319). The processes unsettling the nation-state may be *partial and multiple*, and have different effects on particular nation-states. For example, there are distinctive ‘destabilizations’ that bear on nation-states whose apparent ‘territorial integrity’ was founded on the interpenetration of the metropolitan core with the colonial periphery. Nation-states like the UK were not a solidified economic, cultural and political unity, where the nation and state had clear and co-

terminous spatial boundaries. Rather, they were ensembles of dispersed economic, cultural and political relations that articulated metropole and colonies in ways that enabled the *imaginary* of the sovereign, unified nation-state.

This suggests that escaping from the binary debates about the end of the state (or nation-state) might lead to a more carefully differentiated examination of how states have been remodelled, reformed and reinvented. This might also lead us away from epochal conceptions of changes from one type of state to another (e.g., from the integrated to the disaggregated state, Slaughter, 2004). The imaginary of the monolithic integrated (nation) state nevertheless continues to exert a powerful influence on these discussions; whether imagined as Hobbes' Leviathan or Weber's embodiment of rational administration. At different times, of course, scholars have tried to differentiate functions, roles or institutional arrangements of states, including the Gramscian distinction between strategies of consent and coercion or, more recently, the image of the state's left and right hands used by both Bourdieu and Wacquant (2009). This conceptual metaphor distinguishes between the state's left (welfarist) and right (punitive) hands and provides considerable leverage to Wacquant's project of tracing the entwined transformations of welfare and penal policy. But even if I could get past his perverse gendering of these two hands (the left as 'feminine', the right 'masculine', 2009: 289-291), there is a tendency to give welfarism a positive gloss as though both welfare and the penal system were not always entwined in the management of subordinate social groups. More fundamentally, I do not believe that the state can be understood as only having two hands. It might be better imagined as tentacular or Kali-esque: having many hands and thus able to perform multiple tasks at the same time. States certainly do more than manage domestic populations. They organise political fields and practices (managing forms of democracy, participation and – another contemporary favourite – partnership) as well as trying to manage the interplay of national and international economic processes. And states, not least the USA after 9/11, also address themselves to ordering other international processes and flows around the trope of security.

This tentacular image gets me closer to a more heterogeneous view of the articulated sites, scales, practices and people involved in the work of governing. But it also demands a less institutionalised understanding of the state to grasp the complex flows that traverse its apparent boundaries. The move from government to governance captures something of this fluidity and permeability, but tries too hard to displace the state in favour of a mixture of contracts, networks, and partnerships. Instead, Janet Newman and I have argued for a view of state power and authority becoming more dispersed as more agencies and agents are enrolled into the business of governing (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Newman and Clarke, 2009). This view of dispersal also offers a different understanding of the emergent organisational forms and relationships that make up the landscape of governance: quasi-markets, enforced contracts, compulsory partnerships and other 'hybrid' organisational forms. All of these ways of organising governance are marked by paradoxical, if not contradictory, dynamics that derive in part from the processes of state authorization (and the ties of funding, strategic direction, accountability, responsibility, scrutiny that are involved in states' attempts to manage this new landscape). For me, then, governing still implies forms of the state but points to the dispersed and diverse arrangements through which politics, projects and policies are turned into practice. Indeed, one key

aspect of governing may be the effort to impose coherence on these diverse and dispersed apparatuses.

Janet Newman and I have been exploring the concept of assemblages as a way of addressing with these combinations of heterogeneous elements and efforts to secure forms of stability and coherence (Newman and Clarke, 2009). This focus on assemblage also highlights the importance of particular kinds of agents - translators, mediators and transactors –as the embodiments of particular types of work, labour and practice. ‘Assemblage’ is a concept usually associated with the actor-network theory (e.g. Latour 2005) but it has also been developed within anthropology (Li, 2007, Ong, 2006, Sharma 2008). Assemblage points to the practices that bring together multiple sets of ideas, apparatuses, personnel and practices into apparently coherent entities that function as ways of governing. Sharma, writing about empowerment as a vital assemblage in the attempted reconfiguration of relations between government and people in India, defines assemblage as ‘an evolving formation and flexible technology of government that potentially encompasses different meanings and methods, rather than a singularly coherent discourse and method’ (2008: 35). She argues that dominant ideas and hierarchies are contested; that maintaining them requires work, and that such work entails assembling features of hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideas and practices into new ensembles. Assemblage, then, offers some conceptual leverage for understanding ‘resistance’, pointing to both the work of assembling (the building of assemblages) and their vulnerability to coming apart (under the strain of maintaining their internal connectedness and under pressure from counter-movements). The possibility of failure is thus written into the concept of assemblage (as is the work of repair, renewal and reinvention). In a similar vein, Painter has argued for attention to the ‘prosaic’ practices of governing, in the context of work on the control of ‘anti-social behaviour’ in the UK:

it is impossible to draw a line between ‘state’ and ‘(civil) society’. A range of partnerships, community organisations and voluntary bodies are enrolled not only as the objects of policy, but as the agents of policy too. This is not a classic case of Foucauldian governmentality in which individual members of the population come to be implicated in their own subjectification. Rather, the picture is one of a diverse set of assemblages that effectuate (or sometimes fail to effectuate) particular kinds of state effects. These assemblages are necessarily hybrids of nominally state and nominally non-state institutions, practices and actors. Each assemblage comprises numerous prosaic relationships and activities....The production of the state effect – fighting anti-social behaviour – thus depends not only on myriad mundane and prosaic practices, but also on those practices successfully combining in the particular time-space configuration that will enable the magistrate to make the order, that will allow the anti-ASB machine to *work*. And of course sometimes it doesn’t. The approach advocated in this paper stresses that stateness is failure prone, partial and never completely fulfilled (Painter, 2006: 767-8).

Unfinished business?

In this last section, I want to explore two further issues. The first concerns the relationship between governing and politics. The second concerns the significance of

the ethnographic moment and its implications for how we might theorise governing. The first presses on my attention because of a dilemma about academic, critical and everyday usages of the word politics. Governing seems occupy a rather ambivalent position in relation to politics. It is both a site of politics and also imagined as being outside of politics (the business of administration) or involved in de-politicizing moves. This points to the shifting meanings of politics, a profoundly unstable and contested concept. In a recent book with Janet Newman, we suggested that it was useful to distinguish five different versions of politics – and think about the relationships between them.

Our first version of politics is found in the conception that ‘everything is political’. This is a foundational claim for much critical work in the social sciences. This claim establishes foregrounds processes of contestation and conflict: all issues and aspects of social life are political because they may be contested from conflicting positions, interests, identities or perspectives. It also implies that everything is potentially consequential for how people live together, involving the arrangements of power, material and symbolic inequalities, and forms of social relationship that are at stake in social life. In contrast, the second conception of politics takes a narrower view, centring on what we might call ‘institutional politics’: the apparatuses and practices of representation, rule and government. There are certainly diverse forms of politics in this sense – from dictatorships or one party states through to different forms of multi-party electoral system – but this is a conception of politics as a limited set of processes of representation and rule.

The third version connects in a complex and troubling way to this narrower sense of politics as the processes of representation and government. This is a popular view of politics that treats it as a fundamentally ‘dirty business’: an unsavoury combination of unpleasant processes and people. This conception articulates a sceptical distance from these processes and people, often through the claim that ‘They would do anything to stay in power’. Politics is ‘dirty’ because at its heart stand processes of cynical calculation, instrumental manipulation, spin and corruption. Given many of the practices of actually existing institutional politics, such cynicism or scepticism is hardly surprising. However it often co-exists uncomfortably with hopes or desires that politics should ‘make a difference’.

Fourth, there is a question about what happens in the space between versions one and two above: between the conception that everything is political and the apparatuses and practices of institutional politics. Here I have been suggesting that the two are linked – or, more accurately, mediated – by *political projects* (Dagnino, 2007). These are more than political parties, involving more or less coherent efforts to bring ideas, interests, people and power together. Such projects seek to remake the world (or part of it) in a different way: to give power to the people; to concentrate it in the hands of a deserving elite; to create social justice or to spread market efficiency. Political projects may transcend party allegiances: for example the project of turning unemployed citizens into active labour market participants is not confined to one party, nor indeed to one country. Finally political projects do not just involve politicians: they are elaborated in and carried through by groupings of policy actors that transcend the administrative/political boundary, and that enrol the energies and resources of public service managers, civil society groups, NGOs, local authorities, think-tanks, academics, private sector stakeholders and many others.

Finally, it is vital not to neglect the question of how some things come to be seen or recognised as political. This becoming political is itself the result of political labour. Claiming that something – the decision to close a hospital, for example – is political involves an attempt to make it contestable and thus open it to different points of view, or to different calculations of value. This process of making things political has its obverse - the many strategies for trying to ‘take things out of politics’, or to take the ‘politics out of things’. This is the process of *de-politicisation* that Wendy Brown describes as

construing inequality, subordination, marginalization and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious or cultural on the other.... Although depoliticization sometimes personalizes, sometimes culturalizes, and sometimes naturalizes conflict, these tactical variations are tethered to a common mechanics, which is what makes it possible to speak of depoliticization as a coherent phenomenon. Depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it, No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject. (Brown, 2006: 15; emphasis in original)

In addition to this series of depoliticizing moves, there is also the crucial practice of rendering things technical (Li, 2007). Making things technical (subjecting them to claims of expertise, or administrative rules, for example) is another means of taking things out of politics. Such moves are central to the work of governing, even if, like other such strategies, they are not always successful. The landscape of governing is littered with failed attempts to make things technical that have been overcome by struggles to repoliticise the issues or objectives at stake. In the process, power and history are returned to visibility – rendering the issues contestable once more. This, Jacques Rancière (2006) suggests, is the logic of democracy in opposition to the police logic of administration. It also draws attention to the importance of political labour – as the work of making things political (or de-politicising them).

Such political labour is made visible in the sorts of ethnographic work that feature in this collection. Ethnography can make visible the unfinished character of governing: revealing the practices through which rule is constructed; showing the multiple currents that may be in play alongside the dominant tendencies of a particular moment; and allowing us to see how much work is necessary to sustain, repair and reconstruct dominance. Despite the way in which I have wandered through relatively abstract discussions about labour and governing (and have offered no ethnographic insights of my own), I remain wedded to the importance of the ethnographic moment for thinking about governing. Knowledge of the forms and varieties of practice that are in action creates a critical distance from overly coherent, unified and monological accounts of domination, rule and governing. Keeping us from such epochal accounts of the (singular) dominant trend or tendency is important, if hard, labour. Ethnography tends towards the messy and the excessive: the surplus of social life that overflows the tidy containers of rigorously theorised accounts. To take one instance, Foucault was notably reluctant to engage in this messy business and thus leaves us without a method for dealing with such questions (dismissed by Mitchell Dean as

merely matters of ‘sociological realism’, 1999: 32). At the very start of his 1978-9 Lectures, Foucault notes

So, “government” in the strict sense, but also “art”, “art of government” in the strict sense, since by “art of government” I did not mean the way in which governors really governed. *I have not studied and do not want to study the development of real governmental practice* by determining the particular situations it deals, the problems raised, the tactics chosen, the instruments employed, forged or remodelled, and so forth. (2008: 2; my emphasis)

This has a strong echo of his comment that, in studying the rise of the prison as a site of disciplinary power, he had never been interested in the ‘witches’ brew’ of practices that went on inside prisons (1991: 81-2). It is his and our loss that he was not interested in such ‘real governmental practice’ because the work of governing rarely derives directly from the diagrams, programmes or principles of the contemporary art of government. Instead, governing is engaged by diverse forces in contentious contexts; it is conducted by unreliable agents in multiple locations; and the desired outcomes rarely materialise in their intended form. But what is it that we should then learn from ethnography? If ethnography teaches us that the particular or the concrete is always much richer and more complex than theoretical abstractions, that is interesting rather than important (and certainly does not deny the need for abstraction). Does ethnography teach us that these theoretical abstractions (neo-liberalism; liberal governmentality; domination) always take multiple and different forms in practice? If so, then we might accumulate a more complicated mapping of different instances or examples. But I also hope that ethnography speaks back to theory, rather than just enriching or illustrating it. Is it possible that theories might work better if they addressed the dynamics of heterogeneity of forces; the diversity of sites; the contradictions of projects; the unreliability of agents; the transformative effects of translation and the work of governing as theoretical problems – and not merely the empirical detail of the case study?

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