

What is the University today?

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Abstract

What is the University today? In this paper, a Foucault and Deleuzo-Guattarian inspired approach is taken. I argue that the University is, today, a site of 'neoliberal governmentality', which governs students and academics as sites of human capital. That is, students and academics are governed to self-govern themselves as sites of human capital. This transformation in how students and academics are governed will be identified as a recent trend through the examination of relevant UK-government reports on higher education. Furthermore, it will be identified as a trend that 'decodes' knowledge – in the specific sense developed by Deleuze and Guattari – which renders academic knowledge (the knowledge the student 'consumes' and the knowledge the academic 'produces') meaningless.

Keywords: Foucault, University, Deleuze and Guattari, neoliberal governmentality, knowledge

Introduction

In this essay, I will argue that the University, today, is a *site of neoliberal governmentality* where students and academics are governed as *sites of human capital*. The University's shift towards neoliberal governmentality, which I will outline, is a process that has *decoded* knowledge and captured it within capitalist market relations, rendering academic knowledge - the knowledge the student 'consumes' and the academic 'produces' - today, *meaningless*.

In order to argue this, this essay will take the following structure: (i) in §1, I will present Foucault's analysis of governmentality and neoliberal governmentality; (ii) in §2, I will present Deleuze & Guattari's account of capitalist

axiomatisation; (iii) in §3 I will argue that, since WWII, the University in the UK has increasingly become a site of neoliberal governmentality and that this governmentalisation of the University has rendered academic knowledge meaningless.¹ The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it seeks to enhance and contribute to the research on Foucault's analytics of governmentality, specifically through its application to the University and its conceptual intersection with Deleuze and Guattari.² Second, it seeks to lay the groundwork for bringing Foucauldian and Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual frameworks to bear on critical education policy studies.³

§1 Foucault & Neoliberal Governmentality

§1.1 Governmentality

Before turning to governmentality, it will be useful for me to first situate governmentality within Foucault's analytics of power. Foucault did not provide a single account or concept of power. Rather, he analysed – historically and specifically – manifestations, shifts and discontinuities in power relations. In his (genealogical) analyses, Foucault's approach is bottom-up; that is, it is an analysis of power beginning from its '*infinitesimal* mechanisms' (1980: 98), rather than from, say, its institutional solidifications. Further, it is not a univocal account of power; power differs in its mechanisms, practices and effects in different contexts and relating to the form of power in question. For example: the aims, practices and effects of *sovereign power* are quite distinct from the more modern *disciplinary power*, itself distinct from *governmentality* and *biopower*, etcetera.⁴ In this way, we can say that although Foucault did not provide a single (univocal or all encompassing) *concept* of power, his methodological approach to analyses of power were nonetheless consistently methodologically bottom-up.

Turning to governmentality. Foucault's analysis of governmentality is, firstly, an analysis of the state not as an institution but as a set of practices of governance

(2009: 117). In discussing various definitions of governance, Foucault claims: 'one never governs a state, a territory, or a political structure. Those whom one governs are people, individuals, or groups' (ibid: 122). Historically, governmentality is linked to the birth of liberalism (so, when I speak of liberalism I am also speaking of governmentality and vice versa).⁵ There are three elements Foucault identifies as central to the birth and practice of governmentality.⁶

Firstly: the element of *limitation*. Whilst previous Western arts of governance, Foucault claims, had *external* principles of limitation (eg - God, natural law, natural rights) modern governmental reason functions through *internal* principles of limitation. (Limitation in this sense refers to the limit at which state practices are deemed 'legitimate'.) Instead of 'natural rights' appearing as an external limit to the legitimate exercise of governmental power, for example, modern governmental reason shifts its focus to the practice of government itself. That is, the rationality of governmental practice is gauged in terms not of reaching its absolute external limits (of governing up to a certain defined point), but in relative terms of *excessiveness* gauged internally by the state. This excessiveness can be gauged, measured and calculated with the epistemic instrument of *political economy* (2010: 12-13). The truths revealed by the epistemological device of political economy functions to reveal whether or this or that governmental practice is or is not excessive, and so political economy functions as an epistemological gauge of governmental practice.

Secondly: the element of the *status* of the market. The market, from the Middle Ages until about the seventeenth century, on Foucault's analysis, was a highly regulated and controlled 'site of justice' (ibid: 30) - a site of *jurisdiction*. Through political economy, broadly speaking, 'the market' became viewed instead as a natural phenomenon with its own laws and regularities that governmental practice must respect (that governmental practice must *laissez-faire* with respect to). The market,

that is to say, became viewed as a site of *veridiction*, a site of truth, and a site whose 'freedom' must be respected (ibid: 31-33). Liberalism governs with respect to the market and is judged through the truths revealed by the market (ibid: 45-46; 53). Liberal governmentality must, then, *know* the market and its truths in order that it can respect them. To satisfy this epistemological demand, the state needs economic evidence and statistics. Crucially, through this knowledge, liberal governmentality knows how much freedom to 'produce': 'this new art of government therefore appears as the management of freedom [...] Liberalism formulates simply the following: I am going to produce what you need to be free' (for example, establishing regulations and laws for the foundation of 'free trade') (ibid: 63; also see Polanyi, 1944: 141). Political economy, as an epistemological device, thereby becomes crucial to practices of governance insofar as it functions to reveal the potential excessiveness of governmental practice and likewise insofar as it functions to gauge the success or this or that government policy.

Thirdly: the element of the interplay of interests, freedom and security. As I noted, governmentality knows its internal limits and how much freedom to produce through the knowledge generated through political economy. In producing freedom, however, there are dangers. Too much freedom is, this is to say, a potential *security* issue. Liberal governmentality must then both produce freedom, but also *manage it* when such freedom is deemed excessive; freedom must always be managed and dangers must be 'known' (ibid: 46, 66-67). Governmentality must know these dangers, then, through further epistemological apparatuses: population figures, infant morality rates, crime rates, and so on. It must, as close as possible, have total knowledge, or at least a position of total supervision (which is why Foucault suggests that Bentham's Panopticon is the very formula of liberal government) (ibid: 67). Governmentality is intensely epistemological, governing through political economy and statistical knowledge. These figures function as abstract

quantifications of threats and dangers to excessive or successful governmental practice. We could enumerate examples: a high inflation rate may be taken to suggest excessive governmental practice, as an indication of, say, too much quantitative easing; a high urban homicide rate may be taken to indicate governmental practice that is not managing security threats effectively in urban areas; or a high debt-to-GDP ratio may be taken to indicate high levels of government debt and/or low levels of productivity. In all such cases, the data and statistics produced through the epistemological instrument of political economy serves to guide governmental practice, adjudicating both its excessiveness and its success. In this way, such epistemological investigations are normative precisely insofar as they are judgmental (consistently low GDP figures 'demand' policies in order to stimulate growth). Or in other words, the epistemological endeavours of political economy, and their utilisation by the state, cannot be divorced from their politicality. The politicality of which statistics are investigated in the first place, as well as which ones are utilised in governance, is a central point to be taken from the mutual imbrication of epistemology and politics in Foucault's theory of governmentality.

For Foucault, then, governmentality comprises three shifts: (i) a move from state practices which gauged the legitimacy of governance in terms of external limitation, to one which assessed the legitimacy of governance in terms of internal limitations – further, required for the assessing of governance against these internal limitations was (ii) knowledge in order to assess this effectiveness – found in political economy and statistical knowledge - and through which (iii) the state could strike a balance between collective interest and individual freedom, a balance between security and freedom.

§1.2 Neoliberalism & Neoliberal Governmentality

Foucault views neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality as emerging as a historical development of these practices of liberal governmentality in the

twentieth century. Welfare programs and welfare measures – themselves measures designed to ensure *security* in light of economic crisis (with the aim of, for example, full employment) – were criticised as, precisely, excessive instances of intervention. Neoliberalism emerges out of a ‘crisis of liberalism’ that criticised practices of governmentality for not producing freedom, but rather, destroying it. These criticisms are historically inseparable from – as well as economic crises – the two World Wars, and the rise of fascism, National Socialism and Communism. Neoliberals criticise economically interventionist (Keynesian, welfarist) policies as being qualitatively indistinct – only quantitatively distinct – from the ‘destruction of freedom’ found in fascism, National Socialism and Communism. Neoliberalism reflects a growing state-phobia and a view of certain state practices as inseparable from a pathway to fascism.⁷ In response to this crisis of liberalism, Foucault claims, we see three neoliberal shifts as a result of this growing state-phobia.

First: the market – in liberal governmentality – functioned as an internal limit to governmental practice. In neoliberal governmentality, the market shifts to become the *internal regulatory principle of state practice* itself (Foucault, 2010: 116, my emphasis):

[T]he [neoliberals] say we should [adopt] the free market as [the] organizing and regulating principle of the state, from the start of its existence up to the last form of its interventions. In other words: *a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state.*

Second: whereas in liberal governmentality, a *laissez-faire* approach left the market to exchange and produce, neoliberalism seeks to actively *produce* competition. That is, competition is an objective and indefinitely active policy of neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality (ibid: 120). Neoliberal governmentality, as the first shift indicated, will govern *with the market* as the internal regulatory principle; the market and competition will be the aim of the practice of government (ibid: 121).

Neoliberalism is, crucially, *not laissez-faire*, but rather the permanent fostering of the conditions of competition (ibid: 132). The market is no longer a natural phenomenon that the state retreats from, but it is something continuously generated and supported: '[t]he freedom of the market in particular necessitates a very watchful and active economic policy' (Röpke, 1950: 228).⁸ So, there is permanent, active intervention in neoliberalism. Importantly, this intervention is not directed at the effects of the market – this would be to govern against the market – but so as to encourage and foster its conditions.

Third – where and how is this permanent intervention directed? Neoliberal governmentality is a permanent intervention directed at *society* (Foucault, 2010: 145):

[Neoliberal governmentality] has to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth. Basically, it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market.

For competition to reach into the depths of society as such, this does not just mean that institutions and the state will be governed so as to produce market competition; this also means the governing of the *subject* to produce market competition, to produce marketised and competitive subjects. In neoliberal thought, we see a new development: the *theory of human capital*. What is the theory of human capital? It is, precisely, the (novel) extension of economic analysis into the domain of the subject. The theory of human capital analyses 'human behavior and the internal rationality of this human behavior' (ibid: 223) rather than, say, the economic rationality of the activity of the state or the firm. The individual, then, becomes subject to a complex array of epistemological economic tools: opportunity costs, foregone earnings, stocks of human capital, and so on. Individual choices are (analytically) rendered as always *competitive* or entrepreneurial investments; choices are

'investments' that yield returns in various forms (like all other investments in all other types of capital). The acquisition and continual addition to an individual's stock of capital becomes a constant target of assessment and activity for the competitive individual.⁹ Neoliberal governmentality in part functions and succeeds by rewarding subjects who engage and reproduce marketised and competitive social relations, and by extension, by punishing those who do not. The individual then, is an enterprise-unit. *Homo oeconomicus*, economic man, is an entrepreneur of himself: 'being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (ibid: 226). Neoliberal governmentality's success hinges upon the subject *internalising* and *self-regulating* according to its standards of self-entrepreneurialism and competitiveness. Educational investments are, of course, an important aspect of this investment in the self (ibid: 229; also see Schultz, 1971: 24). This theoretical innovation in economics is indissociable from the development of neoliberal governmentality: the theory of human capital is an epistemological tool - a governing tactic - of neoliberal governmentality.

It is important to highlight that the theory of human capital was a new way of approaching the subject in economics and that it did constitute a new epistemological domain for the discipline. Theodore Schultz opens an early article on this topic seeming to introduce a new domain: 'I propose to treat education as an investment in man and to treat its consequences as a form of capital. Since education becomes a part of the person receiving it, I shall refer to it as *human capital*' (1960: 571). In a later book on the topic, Schultz notes: 'What economists have not stressed is the simple truth that people invest in themselves' (1971: 25). Further, Gary Becker claims that he forms part of a 'human capital "revolution"' alongside others referred to as being part of the Chicago School of Economics (1993: 15).

So, neoliberal governmentality comprises three shifts: (i) a move to market rationality as being the regulatory principle of state practice itself, that (ii) requires permanent intervention in order to produce competition, where (iii) this intervention is directed at *society* and, indeed, at the subject itself through theory of *human capital*. Neoliberal governmentality governs the subject through the production of a field of available action such that the subject is encouraged to be a competitive, entrepreneurial, self-managed site of *human capital*.

§2 Deleuze & Guattari

§2.1 Capitalist Axiomatisation

A full exposition of the political and libidinal economy Deleuze & Guattari develop in *Anti-Oedipus* is, of course, outside the scope of this paper. The key conceptual tool I will be drawing on here is their account of capitalist axiomatisation, specifically of de- and re-coding, and its effects on *meaning*.

For Deleuze & Guattari, axiomatisation is a fundamental economic process that occurs within a capitalistic social organisation. This process of axiomatisation has two mechanisms – ‘decoding’ and ‘recoding’. *Decoding* is the mechanism by which established codes or meanings are destabilised and eliminated. Capitalism, Deleuze & Guattari claim, fundamentally operates through decoding; as Holland notes: ‘[capitalism] decodes because it defines and measures value in terms of abstract quantities, because its basic institution is the market’ (1999: 20). Decoding is a process of abstraction and quantification. *Recoding* is the mechanism by which there is an attempted recapture of those destabilised codes within new or different codes, meanings and sign-systems; in other words, it is the attempted reassignment of meaning and value to that which capitalism destabilises.

Capitalism is, of course, just one specific historical manner in which social production is organised. Deleuze & Guattari

discuss a variety of different forms of organising social production – such as savagery and despotism. Broadly speaking, their claim is that social production can either be organised *symbolically* (qualitatively) or *economically* (quantitatively). Whilst savagery and despotism are organised symbolically-qualitatively – ie, through codes, meanings and sign-systems; capitalism is organised economically-quantitatively – ie, through decoding (which tends to work against codes, meanings and sign-systems) (ibid: 64). So, whereas in symbolically organised systems of social production, systems of meaning and value between different communities are not commensurable due to *qualitative* differences; in economically organised systems of social production, systems of meaning and value between different communities are commensurable *through* their reduction to quantification and abstract value (where, further, quantification and decoding tend to eliminate meaning). To quote Holland (ibid: 66):

Axiomatisation not only does not depend on meaning, belief, and custom, but actively defies and subverts them [...] Quantified flows under capitalism get conjoined solely on the estimation that this or that conjunction will produce surplus-value; such estimation involves economic calculation rather than belief: symbolic meaning has nothing to do with it.

In despotism, codes and meaning were primary; in capitalism, social value is decoded through quantification and abstraction. This is to say that when codes and meaning *do* 'spring up' within a capitalist social organisation (or there is an attempted 'recoding'), capitalism will tend to decode and 'sweep away' this coding; or in other words, capture this meaning within the abstract, quantified 'value' of capital (such as the abstract value of money).

The recoding process is still an important part of capitalist axiomatisation, even if decoding does tend to 'sweep it away'. Recoding in capitalism is that which attempts to capture those decoded flows under a 'meaning'. For example, capitalist recoding serves to 'recapture desire in

[...] codes in the service of [...] capital accumulation' (ibid: 81). Or to rephrase this: recoding in capitalism often serves to continually *insinuate lack*, whereby this insinuated lack functions as the basis for capital accumulation (ibid: 79):

It is only when people can be convinced that they are lacking something [...] that they can be induced to consume and produce at the ever-increasing rate the capitalist economy requires [...] Consumption [is not] an end in itself but merely the means of securing liquid capital for reinvestment in the next cycle of [production].

Capitalist axiomatisation is therefore a fundamentally ambivalent process – it supports both decoding *and* recoding. However, for Deleuze & Guattari, decoding is a much stronger force than recoding; capitalism fundamentally operates through 'unleashing' more decoded flows and capturing social production within economic-quantitative value (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 303):

Capitalism is inseparable from the movement of deterritorialization, but this movement is exorcised through factitious and artificial reterritorializations. Capitalism is constructed on the ruins [of symbolic forms of meaning], but it re-establishes them in its own service and in another form, as [subjective] images of capital.

§2.2 The State and the Worker

If capitalism operates through forceful and continuous decoding and 'artificial' recordings, what role does the state play in this process? For Deleuze & Guattari, the State in capitalism actively participates in this process of axiomatisation. The state is immanent to the processes of de- and recoding, which is also to say that it is subordinated to it:

[The state] is now subordinated to a field of forces whose flows it co-ordinates and whose autonomous relations of domination and subordination it expresses [...] It no longer produces an overcoding unity; it is itself produced inside the field of decoded flows (ibid: 221).

Indeed, they go as far as to claim that that the capitalist State 'evolves entirely within this new axiomatic' (ibid: 252). Their claim is, stated simply and broadly, that the state within capitalistic social organisation increasingly tends to be an *effect* of capital flows and operate in their perpetual circulation, rather than a regulator or overseer of them.

This will become clearer with an example. One such example of a 'flow' that is 'axiomatised' in capitalistic social organisation is the figure of the individual or, more accurately, the subject. An individual's social role or function in (seemingly) *coded* social relations – as say, member of a family, community, or teacher– is *decoded* when these roles are reduced to or are seen as essentially correlative with economic-quantitative functions. The social function or *value* of such social roles is decoded when it becomes reduced to economic-quantitative functions, as opposed to symbolic or qualitative ones. 'Meaningful' qualitative roles (such as that of the teacher who transmits customs and traditions) are decoded when their qualitative function is subordinated to quantitative ones, such as transmitting or contributing to forces of decoding (here, we need think no further than the teacher who transmits skills to students ultimately reducible to students becoming capable of successfully – profitably - participating in capital flows). It is worth quoting Deleuze & Guattari to elucidate this (ibid: 263-264):

Representation no longer relates to a distinct object, but to productive activity itself. The socius as full body has become directly economic as capital-money [...] What is inscribed or marked is no longer the producers or nonproducers, but the forces and means of production as abstract quantities [...] [Individual persons] are nothing more and nothing less than configurations or images produced by the points-signs, the breaks-flows, the pure "figures" of capitalism; the capitalist as personified capital – i.e., as a function derived from the flow of capital; and the worker as personified labor capacity – i.e., a function derived from the flow of labor.

For the purpose of this essay, there are three central points to note in terms of this process of capitalist axiomatisation: (i) axiomatisation is comprised of de- and re-coding. Decoding is the destabilisation of fixed meanings, customs, or sign-systems, whereas recoding is their attempted (re)capture; (ii) under capitalist social organisation, decoding prevails. It prevails insofar as the decoding and capture of meaning within the abstract value of capital-money is that which maintains and reproduces capitalistic social organisation. Its continuation and strength depends on continuous axiomatisation; (iii) further, then, under capitalist social organisation, the tendency is to decode flows in the socius and render them *meaningless* (in the sense that decoding reduces meaning to abstract economic-quantitative value).

§2.3 Neoliberal Governmentality & Capitalist

Axiomatisation

Recall §1.2, where I noted the process that comprised the shift Foucault describes towards neoliberal governmentality – a move that sees the market becoming the internal regulatory principle of state practice, that practices permanent social intervention in order to produce competition, where the example I focused on was on the governmentalisation of subjects as sites of *human capital*. I argue that we can treat this process of neoliberal governmentalisation as a process of axiomatisation (of decoding specifically), as, this is to say, a process that tends to disinvest state practices of governance from meaning aside from their relation to abstract money-capital and render that which is 'captured' by neoliberal governmentality/axiomatisation as *meaningless*. To be more exact:

a. The move, in neoliberal governmentality, to market rationality as a regulatory principle of state practice coalesces with Deleuze & Guattari's treatment of the State in capitalism as an immanent regulator of the field of decoded capital-money flows. Just as Foucault situates the state of neoliberal governmentality as being *under*

supervision by the market, Deleuze & Guattari situate the capitalist state as being subordinated to the continual circulation of capital flows, rather than a regulator or overseer of them.

β. The intervention directed on society, and specifically on the individual itself through the theory of *human capital* merges with Deleuze & Guattari's argument on the individual under capitalist social organisation being an 'image' or 'figure' of capitalism – the worker as 'personified labour capacity', as a 'function derived from the flow of labor'.¹⁰ The *theory of human capital* is a governing tactic of neoliberal governmentality insofar as it situates the subject as (and incentivises the subject to conduct him or herself) as a participator in capital flows, as a site of potential accumulation, appreciation or depreciation. Any *qualitative* function the subject might have is ultimately subordinated to their *quantitative* participation in capital flows, i.e., their perpetuation of processes of decoding.

γ. To this, we can add a third insight: workers – themselves functions of the decoded flows of capital-money – or more specifically what workers 'produce' is, too, *meaningless*, insofar as this 'produce' functions within the decoded abstract value of money-capital. Insofar as labour becomes divorced from qualitative functions and subsumed within quantitative accumulation and circulation of capital flows, labour and what is produced functions as valuable only insofar as it supports processes of decoding.

Taking these conjoined insights from Foucault and Deleuze & Guattari, I will now shift the focus and begin to address more explicitly the question of the *University* today.

§3 What is the University today?

I now turn to the University in the UK from the second half of the 20th century, and argue that in this time frame, the University has become a site of neoliberal

governmentality – where students and academics are governed as sites of human capital. I will focus on two key documents relating to higher education in the UK: the Robbins Report (1963) and the Browne Report (2010), as well as the Research Excellence Framework. Admittedly, these two points of analysis overlook a vast amount of policy transformations in the decades between, and a rich amount of potential genealogical material and analysis. For this reason, my suggestion is that the snapshots taken in this paper be treated as preliminary to further research which would further contribute a more complex and detailed genealogy, and track those historical movements with more subtlety. The analysis offered here, as I noted in the Introduction, seeks to lay the *groundwork* for bringing Foucauldian and Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptual frameworks to bear on critical education policy studies; I do not claim to have fully conducted this within the confines of this paper.¹¹

In order to make one of this paper's central claims – namely, that the University has increasingly become a site of neoliberal governmentality where students and academics are governed as sites of human capital – I will consider the University insofar as it is a site of techniques, practices and technologies of governance (like Foucault's analysis of the state) in two senses. First – as a place where individuals are prepared for certain social roles, professions and so on, as a *producer of subjects*. Second – as a place where research is conducted and knowledge is created, as a *producer of knowledge*.

§3.1 The Robbins Report (1963)

In 1963, the *Robbins Report* on higher education in the UK was released and adopted by the UK government. It was the first post-war UK government report specifically on higher education (and so it was also the first in the historical context of the development of neoliberal governmentality). I will now analyse the *Robbins Report* in relation to the two productive functions of the University I noted.

§3.1.1 The University as a Producer of Subjects I

How does *Robbins* speak of students and the experience of education in the University? In *Robbins*, the University is depicted as a privileged site, as a space of creativity, insight, and the expanding of intellectual and social horizons. The benefits of education are not solely their economic benefits. Indeed, the real or true 'value' or 'meaning' of higher education exceeds quantifiability or is not completely reducible to it (to use the language of §2, it is 'coded') (1963: 151):

[T]he over-riding consideration [of the role of universities] is the undoubted gain to young people of being brought into contact with leaders of thought and of knowing themselves to be members of an institution in which the highest standards of intellectual excellence are honoured.

This student-subject, Robbins hopes, will 'realise that he is not being presented with a mass of information but *initiated into a realm of free enquiry*' (ibid: 182, my emphasis). For Robbins, the function or role of University education is *not* solely the production of economic-competitive subjects, it is not even primarily this, as there is a non-economic, non-quantitative aspect to the 'transformative experience' of education (see Docherty, 2011).

Here, *neoliberal* governmentality does not appear to be operational. The student-subject is engaged in a transformative process of education, one that cannot be assessed or quantified in total relation or reduction to economics. Her conduct is not one that is assessed in relation to the economic tools I noted in §2.2. That is, *the student is not a site of human capital*. Further, education ('consumed knowledge') is treated, for the student-subject at least, as having a certain 'meaning' or 'value' that escapes quantification or the abstract value of money-capital.¹²

§3.1.2 The University as a Producer of Knowledge I

In turning to the University's function as a 'producer of knowledge', I will focus specifically on the issue of publications. *Robbins* explicitly argues against publishing records becoming stand-ins or *measures* of academic excellence: 'published work counts for too much in comparison with other kinds of excellence' (Robbins, 1963: 184). The report stresses the importance of 'academic freedom'. Academic freedom, for Robbins, involves the freedom of inquiry, the freedom to teach and research. It involves freedom *from* market forces or rationality regulating the conduct of academic work. Further, incentivising publishing too much, *Robbins* argues, 'may make persons without either the gift or genuine urge to engage in research do so because they feel that promotion depends on it' (ibid: 184). The University's function as a producer of knowledge is a space of *academic* freedom. This output is, importantly, not an output (like the output of firms) that responds to and assessed explicitly in relation to consumer demand and is not an output that functions in terms of the accumulation and enumeration of output 'units'. *The academic is not a site of human capital* and the knowledge they produce is not a market product. Again, here, it is not clear that *neoliberal* governmentality is operational. Further, the academic's role in participating in a 'realm of free enquiry' and in a student's transformative intellectual experience positions knowledge as quite explicitly having a 'meaning' or 'value' in-and-of-itself; or at least, a meaning or value that could not be reduced to or totally commensurated with quantitative-economic variables.

§3.2 The Browne Report (2010) & the REF

I will now turn to our more contemporary politico-economic context. I will use two reference points: (1) the Browne Report (2010) – adopted by the 2010-2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in the UK; (2) the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is a government-conducted assessment of the academic output of Universities.

§3.2.1 The University as a Producer of Subjects II

So, in what sense do Universities produce subjects today? Or, rather, in what sense, if any, has this changed since *Robbins*? In the *Foreword* to the Browne Report, it states (2010: 2, my emphasis):

A degree is of benefit both to the holder, through higher levels of social contribution and *higher lifetime earnings*, and to the nation, through *higher economic growth rates* and the improved health of society.

Later, *Browne* states (ibid: 31, my emphasis):

[S]tudents will only pay higher *charges* [for a degree] if there is a proven *path to higher earnings* [...] Courses that deliver *improved employability* will prosper; those that make false promises will disappear.

Students only pay 'higher charges' - *invest in themselves* - if there is a 'path to higher earnings' - *if the investment yields profitable returns*. Courses are primarily deliverers of 'employability' - *not* education or knowledge. If courses fail on delivering employability, they will 'disappear' - *degrees are subject to the laws of supply and demand*.

We see here a clear and marked shift from *Robbins*: the student-subject is now the student-consumer, the student-investor, the student-entrepreneur. The student's relation to higher education has, first and foremost, become a relation of consumer to producer; the student-consumer is primarily engaged in the process of purchasing a degree (rather than a non-quantifiable 'transformative' educational experience). Students are consumers, earners, rational-decision makers who respond rationally to product quality and price; they are investors, skill-sets and entrepreneurs in themselves. In other words, *students are sites of human capital*. An individual's assessment of her higher education - her purchase of a commodity, or investment in her capital - is an assessment in the epistemological venue of the market and its truths. The shift in language is clear; neoliberal governmentality is operational, the individual is subject to

neoliberal governmentality. The 'coded' meanings or non-quantifiable 'value' of education we saw in *Robbins* has been, I argue, 'decoded' insofar as the primary assessment tool to gauge the aim, role and function of education is now, explicitly, earnings, employability, etcetera – economic-quantitative variables.

§3.2.2 The University as a Producer of Knowledge II

The *Browne Report* does not address the status or assessment of academic output. For this, I turn to the REF, which is an assessment exercise carried out by the four Higher Education Funding Councils in the UK. It assesses the research output of universities through University departments submitting research portfolios from (falling under various 'units of assessment') detailing staff members, publication lists with case studies detailing how this research had an 'impact', doctoral degrees awarded, research income and research environment (REF, 2012: 2). These submissions are assessed by various panels within the separate units of assessment, broadly under the criteria of 'outputs', 'impact' and 'environment'. 'Impact', for example, which carries a 20% weighting on a final 'score', assesses the 'reach and significance' of research portfolios in terms of impact on the economy, society, and/or culture (ibid: 6). Notably, 'impact' itself excludes impact within academia or education itself (ibid: 48). A 'quality profile' is then drawn up, with departments receiving scores (graded on levels of excellence) for their research output (ibid: 46-47). Producing 'excellent' research is directly linked to government funding, with less funding going to those institutions that produce the least research 'excellence' (Docherty, 2011: 84-95). The REF produces a numerical score for departments and ranks departments in the UK in terms of their research excellence.

Through the REF, then, we see a new version of academic freedom, and a new tool through which academic practice and academic knowledge production is governed. It is a freedom limited (in part) by the market and by the tangible (ie, economic) effects of research on 'society' and

a freedom constrained by whether the epistemological instruments of political economy and statistics adjudicate whether this or that research output 'unit' has 'impact'. It is freedom related, or more strongly, in part determined by the abstract quantification and subsequent comparative ranking of academic research. Departments must score highly in order for their research to be considered 'economically sustainable' and academics must contribute strong publication records for job security.¹³

This new freedom is a freedom managed and produced by neoliberal governmentality - the freedom to be a competitive site of human capital. Academic output, then, *is now* an output that is compared with consumer demand, an output that can affect the profits of a University, an output that is quantifiable and receives a score, comparable to and in competition with other universities in the world. The academic, through this assessment, is a producer in the market for knowledge, a producer in competition with producers in other University-firms – the University as a 'factory of expertise'.¹⁴ Through this assessment, the academic's production of knowledge is micro-managed; the assessment of her conduct against economic barometers is a tactic of neoliberal governmentality. The successful academic is one who internalises and self-regulates their knowledge production in accord with neoliberal governmentality. *The academic is governed as a site of human capital* and their production of knowledge is indeed the production of a market-product.

§3.3 The Meaninglessness of Academic Knowledge

In this historical shift, the position of *knowledge* has considerably altered. For *Robbins*, knowledge was part of a transformative educational experience and its value and meaning was non-quantifiable; for *Browne*, knowledge and skills are what is purchased in the transaction of the degree-consumption. For the academic in *Robbins*, academic freedom was a preserve that was not totally absorbed by the market; in today's REF assessment exercises, knowledge production is ever and always bound

up with market rationality and neoliberal governmentality. The value of knowledge is its quantifiability and relation to the abstract value of money-capital. Knowledge has been 'decoded', its 'consumption' and 'production' have been rendered *meaningless* in the specific sense Deleuze & Guattari developed – it is a decoded flow (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 234):

Knowledge, information, and specialized education are just as much parts of capital ("knowledge capital") as is the most elementary labor of the worker [...] [T]he knowledge flow and the labor flow find themselves in the same situation, determined by capitalist decoding or deterritorialization.

In the years since the *Robbins Report*, the UK government's practice of governmentality in relation to the University has tended towards treating the subject as a site of human capital, and knowledge as a flow, stock or product to be governed in the name of fostering competitive social conditions and the production of surplus-value; in other words, the University's function has been axiomatised (specifically, decoded).¹⁵ The UK University's absorption of tactics, procedures and practices of neoliberal governmentality has decoded the knowledge that the University 'produces', rendering it *meaningless*. Today, the student and academic are heavily incentivised to *govern themselves* as sites of human capital, or more strongly, internalise it. The University, as a putative site of inquiry, critique, research, transformative educational experiences, etcetera, has increasingly and uncritically absorbed a new definition of knowledge, a definition whose standard of assessment is this 'product's' relation to abstract money-capital, ie, decoded quantitative-economic 'flows'.

§4 Conclusions and Further Research

In this essay, I have argued that the University, today, is a site of neoliberal governmentality, drawing from Foucault (§1), and that the University governs students and academics as sites of human capital. Treating this process of neoliberal governmentalisation as a process of

axiomatisation in the sense developed by Deleuze and Guattari (§2), I have further argued that this shift has rendered the knowledge the University 'produces' and the knowledge students 'consume' today as *meaningless* (§3).¹⁶ I have hoped to achieve two aims with this paper. First, to contribute to the research on Foucault's analytics of governmentality by intersecting it with Deleuze & Guattari's account of capitalist axiomatisation and its application to the specific site of the University. Second, to lay the groundwork for bringing this intersection and application to bear on critical education policy studies. As I noted above, much research remains to be done in order to construct a more thorough genealogy of the University in the UK in the latter half of the twentieth century to the present. This groundwork is preparatory.

Furthermore, and as with any account indebted to Foucault as the one I have attempted to develop here, the processes I have described are neither unidirectional nor totalising. The shift to neoliberal governmentality is a recent and contingent historical development. The relative success, or lack thereof, of neoliberal governmentality is bound up with how it impacts upon how a subject relates to him or herself. Under neoliberal governmentality, the subject is incentivised to treat herself as a site of human capital, as a site of potential capital accumulation, appreciation or depreciation, as a participator in capital flows. The internalisation and self-regulation of one's self as a site of human capital can, in this way, be identified as an internalisation and self-governance according to the standards of neoliberal governmentality. If one, then, speaks of *resistance* to neoliberal governmentality, then this relationship of self-to-self becomes a crucial point. In future research, building on these insights, I will investigate and examine potential strategies of resistance to neoliberal governmentality in the University today, strategies towards the constitution of alternative subjectivities through different relationships we can cultivate to ourselves. Of course, such tactics of resistance are not the only ones that can or should be pursued, but are worthy of independent attention nonetheless.

¹ For the purposes of this essay, the focus will be on the University in the UK.

² Research on Foucault's concept of neoliberal governmentality is increasingly vast. Two useful reference points are two special issues of *Foucault Studies*: the first on 'neoliberal governmentality' (Number 6, February 2009) and the second on 'ethnographies of neoliberal governmentality' (Number 18, October 2014). However, no research to my knowledge has yet intersected Foucault's concept of neoliberal governmentality with the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

³ So, although I do engage specifically with much of this research, since my focus is largely conceptual, this research should be taken as complementary to much of the critical work in recent critical education policy studies. Namely: Aslan (2014), Jabbar, Goel La Londe, Debray et. al. (2014), Norlund (2014), Boufoy-Bastick (2015), Courtois and O'Keefe (2015), Muñoz (2015) and Saltmarsh and Randell-Moon (2015).

⁴ Of course, Foucault never claims that one form of power totally 'replaces' another, nor does he claim that different forms cannot overlap and coalesce. Innovations in power gain predominance given particular contexts.

⁵ Tellmann's 'Foucault and the Invisible Economy' provides an interesting analysis of the implications of Foucault's notion of governmentality.

⁶ Foucault traces the idea of 'governing people' not to Greece or Rome, but to the pre-Christian (and then Christian) East in practices of pastoral power and spiritual direction. In the Christian pastorate, people were governed through a system of merit and fault, through subjection to pastoral authority, and through the production of truths about the subject. A triple relationship to salvation, law and truth within networks of obedience that Foucault claimed were taken up, re-established and innovated by governmentality. Foucault's genealogy of practices of governance also draws on the royal state and the police state (on the shifts in the *raison d'État* within these different forms of governance) however I will not be exploring these here. See: Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 122-130; 173; 183-184

⁷ Or the 'Road to Serfdom'. See: Hayek (2001).

⁸ Röpke was an influential figure in post-WWII German economic policy, and Foucault identifies him as an important figure in the development of neoliberalism.

⁹ Barry (2011: 17) notes this well: 'The actors, institutions, habits, subjects of neo-liberalism need to be actively created, sustained and re-created as necessary – the role of government is to create active consumers, active entrepreneurs, to instil entrepreneurialism as both normal and desirable (even enforceable) and to accommodate society to the needs and requirements of 'the market' rather than vice versa.'

¹⁰ Ibid, 264

¹¹ Further pieces of legislation that could be included in such a more complex genealogy include the Education Reform Act 1988 (which abolished academic tenure), the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (which restructured University funding) and the Dearing Report (1997) (which led to Labour's introduction of tuition fees for domestic students). Though these are only examples. I thank one of the anonymous peer reviewers for detailed comments and suggestions on this point.

¹² Of course, I do not wish to overstate this claim. The role of a young, educated workforce as a catalyst for future economic growth and a 'healthy' society plays an important role in *Robbins*. In an illuminating part of the *Robbins Report*, consideration is given to the introduction and implementation of a student-loan style system (not dissimilar to that which was introduced by New Labour in the late 1990s in the UK). The report *rejected* the proposal for a student loan system because, so it argued, it would disincentivise would-be students from entering University education. A crucial reason for wanting to incentivise young people to enter University is to enhance productivity. So, for Robbins, University education ought to be state-funded in order to encourage long-term productivity and growth. We see, then, the early seeds of neoliberal governmentality in *Robbins*, but not yet its fruition; governmentality is still operative – but it is not yet quite neoliberal. See: Robbins, 73; 212

¹³ Although I do not have space to explore this here, it would be interesting to explore the extent to which such strategies of research assessment impact upon the *types* of knowledge that academics produce, or the form such knowledge is produced in. Does it incentivise smaller and less time consuming articles and disincentivise the production of monographs? What effect would (or, does, as the case may be) such incentives have?

¹⁴ As such, through the 'output' of UK universities - 'brainpower' makes up 25% of UK exports. See: Smith (2012: 652).

¹⁵ This, of course, is not dissimilar from the predictions made by Jean-François Lyotard in 1979 when he claimed that (1984: 4): 'We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the "knower," at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process [...] The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is tending [...] to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume [...] Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production.'

¹⁶ One related issue I have not been able to explore here how the University governs 'domestic' as opposed to 'international' students. It is of note that the introduction of tuition fees in the time frame I have focused on here – so, the first instance of commodification of higher education in post-WWII UK – was achieved by Margaret Thatcher and applied only to international students. Today, international students face higher fees and also increased monitoring. Canaan (2013: 43) explores this issue, where many University staff must in effect 'act as an arm of the UK Border Agency, monitoring student attendance ostensibly to ensure that no potential terrorists lurk amongst the ranks of foreign students'. Such governance forms part of a broader strategy of security. For more on this, see Amooore (2006); Vaughan-Williams (2010; 2009) and Salter (2006).

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