On governmentality and screens

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In lectures and seminars at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979, the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault delineated a project to investigate 'The government of one's self and of others', pursuing what his initial course summary described as 'an in-depth inquiry concerning the history not merely of the notion but even of the procedures and means employed to ensure, in a given society, the "government of men"'. In doing so, Foucault described a 'rationality of government', or, in his now widely used neologism 'governmentality', as a system of thinking about the nature and goals of government, where 'government' itself is defined 'in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour'. 'To govern, in this sense', he wrote in a short essay called 'The subject and power', 'is to structure the possible field of action of others'; elsewhere he talked and wrote about government as the shaping of the conduct of the self.[1]

One of his central lines of inquiry, in the classroom and in scattered writings and interviews, was the question of how power was exercised – how the actions of selves and others were shaped – in societies whose modernity was bound up with their commitment to liberal government. Liberal governmental rationality, Foucault argued, placed 'at the centre of its concerns the notion of population and the mechanisms capable of ensuring its regulation', a process carried through the invention of, and experimentation with, ways of knowing, calculating and mobilizing individual bodies and populations.[2] (In this light, Foucault's earlier investigations of the human sciences, of health, of the prison and of sexuality could be recast as aspects of this genealogy of liberal governmentality.) Yet integral to this *regulation* was an ongoing reflection in liberal thought on the proper limits of state government and how to rationalize the exercise of power. Ideas and practices of 'freedom'

1 Michel Foucault, 'Security, territory and population', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984: Volume I, Ethics* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 67; Foucault, 'On the government of the living', in ibid., p. 81; Foucault, 'The subject and power', in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 21.

2 Foucault, 'Security, territory and population', p. 67.

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3   Foucault, 'Governmentality', in
    Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon
    and Peter Miller (eds), *The
    Foucault Effect: Studies in
    Governmentality* (London:
    Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), in
    particular pp. 99–103.

4   Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of
    Freedom: Liberalism and the
    Modern City* (New York, NY:
    Verso, 2003), p. 15.

5   Foucault, 'The political technology
    of individuals', in Luther Martin,
    Huck Gutman and Patrick
    H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of
    the Self: a Seminar with Michel
    Foucault* (London: Tavistock
    Publications, 1988), pp. 145–62.

6   George W. Bush, cited in James
    Hay and Mark Andrejevic,
    'Introduction: toward an analytic
    of governmental experiments in
    these times: homeland security as
    the new social security', *Cultural
    Studies*, vol. 20, nos 4–5 (2006),
    p. 341.

and of *laissez faire* economic and political management were central to the self-definition of liberal governance.[3] Liberalism was founded on what Patrick Joyce has termed an 'agonism' of freedom, an invitation to freedom alongside the anxiety that such freedom would overwhelm governmental order.[4]

Anxieties about the slippery dynamics of freedom and security would underpin the establishment of 'mechanisms of security' (for example social welfare, the regulation of popular cultures, the more recent creation in the USA of a 'Department of Homeland Security' amidst increased surveillance of populations). And, crucially, such anxieties about rights and responsibilities would inform the elaboration of 'technologies of the self' whereby individuals would bring themselves into conformity with the ideals of the autonomous, self-regulating and civil subject of liberalism.[5] The 'government of one's self', the acceptance and enactment of responsibilities, was integral to the invention and spread of an expansive liberal governance and its contemporary neoliberal incarnations. No less a political theorist than George W. Bush observed, during his second inaugural address, that 'Self-government relies, in the end, on the governing of the self'.[6] Clearly, everybody is reading Foucault these days.

Undoubtedly, this too-brief account of aspects of a fragmentary and unfinished work on governmentality belies its historical and conceptual complexity; yet so be it for now. I will in any case return to the import of this work to argue for its usefulness for projects of screen studies, to propose that this work on liberal governmental rationalities in particular can open up new ways of understanding the role and function of media cultures as aspects of liberal (and neoliberal) governance and the concomitant cultural shaping of self-regulating citizens and populations. This short essay will concentrate on film, though I will draw on work from television studies, cultural studies and cultural history (and part of my argument will indeed be that this conceptual work forces us to think across medium-specific boundaries).

Yet before pursuing that, it is worth pausing briefly to elaborate the conceptual intervention proposed by Foucault's work for the dominant conceptions of the functioning of power and the subject, particularly those articulated in the Marxist and psychoanalytic scholarship at the time of Foucault's writing and teaching. There is a certain value to this task in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of *Screen*, for it was a fusion of Marxism and psychoanalysis that underpinned the elaboration of what came to be called '*Screen* Theory', and that had a decisive effect on the shaping of film scholarship and curricula as film studies programmes proliferated in the humanities in higher education throughout the 1970s. The discipline of film studies (as scholarship and as pedagogy) was shaped in important ways by these conceptual models of ideology, subjectivity and representation. Even though it is now routine to (mildly) dismiss this tradition – attention to empirical audiences or the much trumpeted 'historical turn', it is often claimed, are ways out of the

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'impasse' of *Screen* Theory – it still informs the routine critical practices relating to textual analysis and the interpretation of representation and ideology that pervade scholarship in the field. If, as Foucault often remarks, genealogy frequently begins from a question asked in the present, I propose here a very brief genealogy of the formation of *Screen* Theory as a political modernism, and of the different forms of critical thought that were marginalized as film theory and studies became tied to particular intellectual traditions, in order to begin thinking about how our present moment presents new possibilities for intellectual enquiry and engagement with different traditions of scholarship.

It is by now an oft-told story, a sort of foundational myth for a discipline often understood from within as radical: starting most notably from the early 1970s, a group of left-leaning humanities scholars developed in the pages of *Screen* a dizzying and influential blend of Marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics that ultimately positioned mainstream cinema as an 'ideological apparatus'. Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and Bertolt Brecht frequently bumped into each other on the pages of the journal; and intellectuals interested in film, among them Ben Brewster and Geoffrey-Nowell Smith, spent time translating Althusser and Gramsci (between 1974 and 1977 Brewster and Nowell-Smith also served consecutively as *Screen* editors). Althusser's rethinking of the Marxist thesis of economic determination was particularly important. In work throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Althusser had argued that 'superstructures' (legal/political and ideological practices) had a greater effect on the social formation than previous Marxist scholarship had suggested, even if the economy determined that formation 'in the last instance'.[7] In his widely read essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', for example, Althusser argued that the reproduction of the conditions of production is maintained by the 'reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers', that is the work of 'Ideological State Apparatuses', including churches, schools, the family, the communications media and 'the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)'.[8]

Althusser's work increasingly utilized psychoanalysis to explain how ideology shapes or 'authors' subjectivity. To do so, he drew in particular on Jacques Lacan's structuralist reworking of Freud to propose that ideology 'interpellates' – that is, addresses, appeals to – an individual as a free and unified subject, but that this position is an 'imaginary' one, masking the 'real conditions of existence.'[9] 'Ideology is indeed a system of representations', Althusser wrote, 'but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with "consciousness". . . . They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them.'[10] Lacan supplied, for Althusser and many others in his wake, what seemed to be an elucidation of the recognition/misrecognition structures associated with ideology. The connections drawn between ideology and the Unconscious shaped the development of a *Screen* Theory that focused on the question of the

7 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes toward an investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1971), p. 130.

8 Ibid., pp. 128, 137.

9 Ibid., p. 162.

10 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 233.

11 On this configuration of film theory, see D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and on the work in *Screen* in particular, see Philip Rosen, '*Screen* and 1970s film theory', in Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

12 For a more detailed consideration of Foucault's work on psychoanalysis, see Lee Grieveson, '"The death of psychoanalysis"?: Foucault on Lacan', *New Formations*, no. 31 (1997), pp. 189–201.

13 Foucault, 'The subject and power', p. 221.

14 Foucault, 'Governmentality', p.103.

15 Nikolas Rose, 'Governing "advanced" liberal societies', in Thomas Osborne, Andrew Barry and Nikolas Rose (eds), *Foucault and Political Reason* (London: UCL Press, 1996).

spectator, conceived as a textually implicated subject.[11] In a watered-down version, this conception of the functioning of the Unconscious and of ideology underpins the myriad readings of representation as ideology that shape much (stale, repetitive, predictable) work in the field.

In work throughout the 1970s on the prison, sexuality and, towards the end of the decade, on governmentality, Foucault articulated a conception of power that diverged from the then dominant Marxist model of ideology and its connection to the State, and likewise proposed, if at times sketchily, a different understanding of the interconnection of subjects and power than that articulated in the fusion of Marxism and psychoanalysis.[12] Written in the context of a post-'68 breakdown of Marxist orthodoxies, partly stimulated by the influence of Eastern European dissidents (many of whom Foucault welcomed to France), this work claimed that power was not located solely in the State and that the economic infrastructure of capitalism did not determine the varied operations of power. The formulation of the work on governmental rationalities made this intervention clearer, for the argument that power shifted from a juridico-discursive form – where power was concentrated in a central source – to a more all-pervasive focus on populations implicitly critiqued the conception of the functioning of the State in Marxist analysis.

The realms of government and the State, Foucault argued, were (and are) not coterminous. '"Government",' he observed in a note on the history of the term and practice, 'did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed.'[13] Foucault's research on the history of prisons and of sexuality, for example, suggested that this direction of conduct pervaded the social body; that it did not emanate from a centre; that tasks initially taken up outside the State were only later taken over by the State (what Foucault called a 'governmentalization' of the State);[14] and that the direction of conduct was not directly or univocally tied to economic goals (even if they were frequently interconnected). As a further exploration of the genealogy of this intellectual moment, it is worth noting also that Foucault's work on governmentality was articulated in the context of the full force of neoliberal governmental rationalities that had ushered in, by the 1970s, a series of profound shifts in conceptions of government and corresponding conceptions of selfhood. These ideas included the belief that the State had grown too big and inefficient, that many projects of governance could be better undertaken by the private sector, that welfare liberalism should be rolled back, and that government should produce an entrepreneurial self and an 'enterprise culture'.[15] Again, genealogy starts from a question asked in the present.

If Foucault's analysis was here partly a historical one, ultimately about the formation of liberal governmentality and its rearticulation as neoliberalism, it was also necessarily a conceptual one, for it was predicated on a revision of contemporary Marxist scholarship's

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16 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1980), p. 118.

17 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: an Introduction* (1976), trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), in particular pp. 118–47.

18 Ibid., p. 143.

19 Michel Foucault 'Technologies of the self', in Martin et al. (eds), *Technologies of the Self*, pp. 16–49; *The Use of Pleasure: the History of Sexuality, Volume II* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1985); *The Care of the Self: the History of Sexuality, Volume III* (New York, NY: Random House, 1988).

20 Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', *Screen*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1979), pp. 13–34.

21 Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, Sexuality, 1909–1925* (London: Routledge, 1988); Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and 'The Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989); Elli Hanson (ed.), *Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

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understanding of the functioning of ideology and of the Hegelian traces of essentialism therein. In an interview in 1977, Foucault delineated three problems with the notion of ideology: 'it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth'; it 'necessarily' refers 'to something of the order of the subject'; and ideology stands in a 'secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant'.[16] Ideological critique poses a series of conceptual difficulties, then, because it presumes that the real can be known outside of its representations, and because it presupposes either the idealist subject of philosophy, imbued with a consciousness ready to be worked upon, or a 'hermeneutics of the subject' – that is, the idea that there was a central truth to the subject that could be revealed by knowledge (and that this could free the subject from power or, in part, repression, as Marxism and psychoanalysis proclaimed).

In this latter sense, Foucault's disputation of the model of ideology and the subject dovetailed with his critique of psychoanalysis, articulated most clearly in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, in which he proposed that Freud marked the culmination of a hermeneutics of the subject which located the truth of the subject in sexuality and rendered this truth 'knowable'.[17] Psychoanalysis stands alongside other human sciences that delineated the truths of subjectivity and that were enmeshed with a 'bio-power' or liberal governmentality increasingly focused on the understanding of individuals and populations – bringing 'life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations' – as a necessary step in regulating and managing them.[18] The second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, published after Foucault's death, trace a history of subjectification beyond hermeneutics, both decoupling 'technologies of the self' from the modes of subjection central to liberal governmental rationalities and the human sciences and tracing the history of their interconnection.[19]

The ramifications of the critique of ideology and of psychoanalysis for film theory and film studies were not considered in any great detail within the discipline. Foucault's work was occasionally engaged with – his essay on authorship was published in *Screen*, for example, and those engaged in debates about the auteur considered it;[20] his work on sexuality informed important work on censorship, pornography and queer theory (where Judith Butler's reworking of Foucault was particularly influential).[21] Yet for film studies, engagement with the conceptual work on power and the subject was largely avoided, effected perhaps by the dominance of Althusserian and Lacanian paradigms and their importance to the discipline's proliferation in humanities faculties (where a 'radical' self-identity helped to define its place in the university).

The contemporaneous formation of undergraduate and graduate programmes in film studies produced scholars well versed in *Screen* Theory; and continuing pedagogical pressures – as the study of film, television and new media proliferates within various departments in

universities – push textual and interpretive analysis to the fore of what frequently happens in classrooms. Shifting attention away from the analysis of textual regimes, whose influence on consciousness is invariably imagined as ideological, can lead us to ask different research questions and to frame different objects of analysis. Ultimately, I want to propose that engagement with governmental rationalities can lead to a more thorough and precise reckoning with the place screen cultures have played in the government of self and others, in the formation of self-regulating liberal subjects and populations capable of civic and productive conduct.

Models for this scholarly work do exist, notably in traditions of cultural studies and cultural history, where a number of scholars have engaged in particular with the work on governmental rationalities to propose and model new methods of cultural analysis. I want to suggest that film studies can usefully draw upon this work, so becoming repositioned as part of a broader cultural history (we might call this, in the present context, 'screen studies'). What questions, what objects of analysis, what conceptions of the work of culture have been enabled by this engagement with governmentality? Collectively, this work examines culture as a regime of truth practices that are implicated in forms of governmental rationality. In *The Birth of the Museum*, for example, Tony Bennett shows how culture as morals, manners and beliefs became increasingly important to liberal governmental rationalities focused on the management of populations. In this context, museums emerge as a corollary to liberalism, as an 'environment which allowed cultural artefacts to be refashioned in ways that would facilitate their deployment for new purposes as parts of governmental programmes aimed at reshaping general norms of social behaviour'.[22] Museums functioned in particular, Bennett argues, to endow the self with new capacities for self-monitoring and self-regulation.

As Ian Hunter has suggested in *Culture as Government*, this function was central also to the birth of literary education, which established the study of literature as a form of ethical self-management, a mechanism to produce civic subjects.[23] Literature itself takes on parts of this role. Feminist literary historians, for example, have shown how the nineteenth-century genres of domestic fiction and advice manuals modelled 'ideal' configurations of selfhood.[24] Culture becomes, in myriad ways, central to the concretization of technologies of the self in concert with liberal governmental rationality. This work in cultural studies and cultural history proposes that attention be paid to institutions as well as to representations; that scholarly work assess more carefully cultural policy as a way to understand culture as a form of governance; that reflecting on the establishment of disciplines sheds light on the cultural formation of governance (a project important to others in historicizing the human sciences); and that marginal and didactic forms of culture might usefully be excavated for their important roles in fashioning selfhoods and governing conduct.

22 Tony Bennett *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

23 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: the Emergence of Literary Education* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

24 See, for example, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire And Domestic Fiction: a Political History Of The Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

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25 Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Toby Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

26 Lisa Parks, 'Points of departure: the culture of US airport screening', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2007), pp. 183–200, and 'Satellite views of Srebrenica: televisuality and the politics of witnessing', *Social Identities*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2001), pp. 585–611; Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: a Politics of Transition in Britain and India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); the AHRC project, 'Colonial cinema: moving images of the British Empire', is led by Colin MacCabe and myself.

27 Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: the Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Grieveson and Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies*.

28 Anna McCarthy 'Reality television: a neoliberal theatre of suffering', *Social Text*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2007), pp. 17–42; Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Music and Film Don't Work Together* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

29 Lee Grieveson, 'Cinema studies and the conduct of conduct', in Grieveson and Wasson (eds), *Inventing Film Studies*, pp. 3–37.

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The confluence of governmentality studies with cultural studies and cultural history informs a growing body of work in screen studies. It is important, for example, to Toby Miller's wide-ranging analysis in his book *Technologies of Truth* of the institutional and discursive production of what he calls 'the well-tempered self', and of the interconnections between the production of that self and the governance of popular culture.[25] Likewise this confluence informs work on the interconnection of screen media and political rationalities, such as Lisa Parks's analysis of post-9/11 security cultures and of media policies in former conflict states; or work on the place of cinema in a colonial governmentality and management of subaltern populations that was always inextricably enmeshed with the 'freedom' of liberal governmentality, as exemplified in Priya Jaikumar's work, as well as in ongoing investigations of British colonial cinema in a current Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project in the UK.[26] It also underpins Haidee Wasson's work on the import of institutions such as museums for the study of cinema and our work together on the history of the discipline of film studies.[27] And this confluence of conceptual and historical work on governmentality is clearly at play in the analysis of the neoliberal rationalities of postwar/ Cold War and contemporary media industries, for example, by Anna McCarthy and Kay Dickinson.[28]

Currently, my own research is pursuing some of the conceptual and historical questions opened up by work on governmental rationalities and by the rethinking of the study of cultural forms and activities and the relations of power that inform their production, distribution, exhibition, and discursive and material effects. The work is grounded in the premiss that cinema might be situated, at a particular moment (the first third or so of the twentieth century, say), as a node around and through which flowed discourses and practices of government as a shaping of the modalities of selfhood, citizenship and populations. Three possible avenues open themselves to analysis here. Firstly, knowledge about cinema was produced from within the newly formed (and forming) social sciences studying the potential effects of the medium on individual and collective conduct. Counting audiences and examining their responses and interactions with cinema was one part of a liberal political technology. The innovation of the study of cinema as a way both of knowing people and their interiority and of innovating forms of ethical self-management was formed in this context also.[29]

Secondly, at the same time, cinema was being utilized and fashioned by various elite individuals, groups and institutions as a resource to manage conduct and thus to shape populations. Widely seen (but little analyzed), a plethora of industrial, reform and government films were produced and disseminated via new circuits of distribution, carrying the films to various civic spaces – schools, church halls, factories, community halls, prisons, immigrant landing stations – as participants in a pedagogic shaping of conduct. A complex interface of education, screen culture and government requires unpacking here. Undoubtedly,

30 Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson (eds), *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming); Marsha Orgeron, Devin Orgeron and Dan Streible (eds), *Learning with the Lights off: the Educational Film Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). The Prelinger Archive at http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger hosts around two thousand digitized 'ephemeral' or 'sponsored' films from a collection of over sixty thousand.

the emergence of work on non-theatrical cinemas, including the formation of a Society for Cinema and Media Studies scholarly caucus on non-theatrical cinema, symposia, websites and forthcoming edited collections, is an important development in the field.[30]

Thirdly, the analysis of textual forms can extend beyond non-theatrical and/or didactic cinema to include mainstream cinemas. Conceptual work on the production of liberal subjects might, for example, inform a rethinking of longstanding questions about the formation of norms of narrative form and characterization in classical cinema, which may be repositioned as modeling aspects of liberal selfhood. Classical cinema, it might be argued, is a particular technology of the self. In turn, specific films, cycles and genres may be conceptualized as symbolic spaces for the articulation of ideas about conduct, government and the liberal subject. Together, such films and cycles arguably do more than simply *represent* aspects of governance: they form part of structures of knowledge and power, and enact models of selfhood and conduct that participate in the production of liberal subjects.

Taken together, nascent work on governmentality and screen culture enables a detailed examination of the interconnection of political rationalities and screen media. Certainly, it is entirely plausible that other traditions of scholarly work – aspects of sociology, social history and political science, for example – may also open up aspects of this examination. And no doubt examination of the interface of political rationalities and screen cultures needs to be sensitive to the contingencies of time and place, concretizing the sweeping and provisional nature of Foucault's sketches on governmental rationalities. For these purposes, the categories of liberalism and neoliberalism are too broad and must be supplemented by attention to specific strategies (for example, the emergence of the New Deal in the 1930s as, thus far, the high-water mark of interventionist social, cultural and economic policies in the history of the USA). Notwithstanding the caveats, however, there is great promise in this conceptual opening into thinking about governmentality and the place of screen cultures within that – a promise that can productively inform politically engaged future screen/*Screen* theories and histories.

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