

ARTICLE

The Work of Neoliberal Governmentality: Temporality and Ethical Substance in the Tale of Two Dads

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ABSTRACT: This paper considers debates around the neoliberal governmentality, and argues for the need to better theorize the specific ethical practices through which such programs of governmentality are carried out. Arguing that much theoretical and empirical work in this area is prone to a “top down” approach, in which governmentality is reduced to an imposing apparatus through which subjectivities are produced, it argues instead for the need to understand the self-production of subjectivities by considering the ethical practices that make up neoliberal governmentality. Moreover, taking Robert T. Kiyosaki’s *Rich Dad/Poor Dad* as an illustrative case, the point is made that the work of neoliberal governmentality specifically targets the temporalities of conduct, in an attempt to shape temporal orientations in a more entrepreneurial form. Drawing on Foucault’s lecture courses on liberalism and neoliberalism, and Jacques Donzelot’s work on the social, the case is made that neoliberal governmentality exhorts individuals to act upon the residual social temporalities that persist as a trace in the dispositions of neoliberal subjects. Moreover, the paper concludes with a discussion of the potentials for resistance in this relation, understood as temporal counter-conducts within neoliberalism.

Key words: neoliberalism, governmentality, temporality, the social, Foucault, Donzelot, counter-conduct.

Every day with every dollar, you choose to be rich, poor or middle class. ¹

Rich Dad Poor Dad is a best selling book on financial advice written by Robert T. Kiyosaki. Originally self-published in 1997 as supporting material for Kiyosaki’s fi-

¹ Robert T. Kiyosaki, *Rich Dad/Poor Dad*, (New York: Business Plus, 2000), 197.

nancial advice lectures, and later picked up by Warner Business Books in 2000, the text relates a rich allegorical narrative about the mental hard wiring required for financial success, and the concealed “ways of thinking” practiced by the wealthy. Kiyosaki’s method is comparative: he tells of his childhood relationships with two fathers; one a biological parent, the other a friend’s father who undertook the task of young Robert’s financial education. Each father presented radically distinct outlooks on financial life. His own father, the poor dad, was a government man, head of the Department of Education for the state of Hawaii who, in spite of his impressive qualifications and career accomplishments, remained “poor” his whole life, snarled in a plodding, credentialist faith in institutional advancement as a slow climb up the ladder of bureaucratic hierarchy. The rich dad, on the other hand, was a self-made millionaire with an eighth grade education who held a deep distain for the naïve approach to wealth generation practiced by the majority of Americans—one that conceived of earned reward in terms of educational credentials and the patient advance to higher salaried positions within a single firm. Throughout the book, poor dad’s dour lectures on the virtues of patience, loyalty and circumspection were contrasted with rich dad’s exhortations to swashbuckling fiscal adventurism, self-interest and self-responsibility. Kiyosaki compares the advice offered by his two dads:

My two dads had opposing attitudes in thought...

One dad recommended, “study hard so you can find a good company to work for.” The other recommended, “study hard so you can find a good company to buy.”

One dad said, “the reason I’m not rich is because I have you kids.”

The other said, “the reason I must be rich is because I have you kids.”

One said “when it comes to money, play it safe, don’t take risks.” The other said, “learn to manage risk.”²

At first blush, the case of *Rich Dad Poor Dad* might seem innocuous enough: another proselytizing tome in a long tradition of entrepreneurial boosterism extending from Horatio Alger through Norman Vincent Peale to Donald Trump—a discourse on fiscal self-realization extolling the virtues of entrepreneurship and voluntarism as a personal ethic. Yet what distinguishes this example is not just its timeliness given the current zeal for anti-welfarist, anti-statist rhetoric, and its veneration for market cowboyism, (nor it’s stunning popularity, becoming a *New York Times* best selling title in 2002), but the specific way in which it dramatizes the dynamism within this space, what we might describe as the inner life of the neoliberal subject. This space is characterized by a specific tension between the inertia of social dependency and the exuberance and vitality of market agency—a tension that is, in Kiyosaki’s prose, barbed with exhortations to mobilize the latter against the former.

² Ibid, 15-16.

In what follows, the provocations posed by Kiyosaki's tale of two dads will provide a backdrop for an inquiry into debates around what has come to be termed "neoliberal governmentality."³ I take this term to indicate the ways in which subjects are governed as market agents, encouraged to cultivate themselves as autonomous, self-interested individuals, and to view their resources and aptitudes as human capital for investment and return.⁴ Neoliberal governmentality presumes a more or less continuous series that runs from those macro-technologies by which states govern populations, to the micro-technologies by which individuals govern themselves, allowing power to govern individuals "at a distance," as individuals translate and incorporate the rationalities of political rule into their own methods for conducting themselves.⁵ However, in much recent work on governmentality, the emphasis has fallen on the institutional logics, the assemblages, technologies and *dispositifs*, as Foucault called them, through which the rationalities of neoliberal governmentality invest populations, while less emphasis has been placed on the practical, ethical work individuals perform on themselves in their effort to become more agentive, decisionistic, voluntaristic and vital market agents.⁶ The tale of *Rich Dad Poor Dad* reminds us of the dynamic practices by which neoliberal governmentalities are incorporated. Moreover, it suggests that these practices are ethical, in the sense that Foucault used the term in his later work: they involve daily work performed upon specific objects or features of the self held to be problematic—"ethical substances," as Foucault called them, which in this case implicates and acts upon the embodied, moribund collectivist dependencies and dispositions that are the legacy of poor dad's mode of existence.

³ Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*. Translated by Graham Burchell. (New York: Palgrave, 2008). Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, "Introduction" in *Foucault and Political Reason*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996). Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999). Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self" in *Foucault and Political Reason*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose. (London: UCL Press, 1996). Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Biopolitics'—Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neoliberal Governmentality" *Economy & Society*, 30, 2 (2001): 190-207.

⁴ Nikolas Rose, "Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies" in *Foucault and Political Reason*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996).

⁵ Sam Binkley, "Governmentality and Lifestyle Studies" *Sociology Compass*, 1: 1 (July 2007): 111-126. Nikolas Rose, Pat O'Malley and Mariana Valverde, "Governmentality" *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 2 (2006): 83-104.

⁶ Sam Binkley, "The Perilous Freedoms of Consumption: Toward a Theory of the Conduct of Consumer Conduct" *Journal for Cultural Research*, 10: 4 (October 2006): 343-362. Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

In short, governmentality expresses a certain series or relation between power and the subject, yet it is important to remember that this series is not seamless and complete. Instead, governmentality represents what Foucault called an unstable “contact point” between techniques of domination (or subjection), and the actual practices of subjectification by which neoliberal subjects govern themselves. Or, as Foucault put it in his 1980 lecture at Dartmouth College:

The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.⁷

In other words, the relation of the subject before power is not reducible to the simple production of neoliberal subjects: what is involved is the production of self-producing subjects—subjects whose own self-production is prone to reversals and appropriations, to “mis-productions” through which the subject produces herself differently than is intended by power itself. By considering the specific ethical practices through which individuals isolate and act upon certain elements within themselves, as they work to transform themselves from socially dependent subjects into neoliberal agents (or from poor dads into rich ones), it is possible to draw out the ambivalence that operates in this point of contact. Between *dispositifs* and ethical practices, or between techniques of coercion and the processes by which subjects construct themselves, there is, implicit within neoliberal governmentality, an indeterminacy that leaves open the possibility of doing things differently. Toward this end, I will attempt a theoretical reconstruction of the ethical dynamism that constitutes the work of subjectification, drawing anecdotally and for illustrative purposes on the allegory of the two dads, and the specific kinds of work on the self related in Kiyosaki’s gentle exhortation.

More precisely, in seeking to emphasize these practical dimensions, I will highlight the precise object of everyday conduct that appears as the ethical substance, or the specific material upon which ethical practices work—that part of the self that is made the object of the transformative work of neoliberal governmentality. This substance is defined by time and the changing practices of temporal calculation and practical orientation by which everyday conduct is undertaken. Considering the temporal sensibility of social dependence as the substance of an ethical problematization within the practice of neoliberal governmentality, it is possible to consider how neoliberal subjects work to optimize, individualize and entrepreneurialize

⁷ Foucault 1993: 203-4, cited in Thomas Lemke “Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique” *Rethinking Marxism*, 1, 3, (2002): 49-64(16).

themselves and their conduct—a program of subjectification centered on the vitalization and responsabilization of a dependent subjectivity, but also one shadowed by a certain ambivalence and instability, a technique of subjectification that remains open to the potential for being otherwise practiced.

1. Governmentality, Subjection and Subjectification

I will begin with the question of this ambivalence within governmental practices. While it is not my intention to expand the already voluminous exegetical literature on Foucault's oeuvre (much less evolve a prescriptive template for how "resistance" might be strategized), it is nonetheless helpful to locate my project within the familiar reference points of his scholarship.

By considering governmentality not as a political rationality in a technical sense, but as an everyday ethical undertaking, I am attempting to incorporate elements from what are considered distinct moments of Foucault's intellectual trajectory, drawing from his later work of the 1980's on the ethics of the self, in order to resolve problems posed elsewhere, in the late 1970's, in his studies of governmentality, biopower and discipline.⁸ Indeed, between these two moments are distinct and contrasting understandings of how it is that subjects are produced in relationship to the larger structures they inhabit. In a general sense, Foucault's work of governmentality occupies a position between his genealogical studies of *dispositifs*, (or the apparatuses of power by which modern societies organize their populations through state apparatuses and institutional structures), and his studies of the ethical practices of the Ancient world, where the emphasis falls on the specific creativity of the individual in fashioning a unique relation to herself.⁹ At the risk of over-simplification, it can be argued that, while in the case of the former, the subject is produced by power, in the case of the latter, the subject is produced by power as a self-producing subject. Foucault arrives at a discussion of the latter relation, the production of self-production, with the term *assujétissement*—a term that is variously translated in English as subjection, subjectification or subjectivation, each term shaded with subtle differences of meaning. "While such a meaning implies the passivity of the subject," Rosenberg and Milchman write, "Foucault also sees *assujétissement* as entailing more

⁸ Foucault, "Governmentality". Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. Trans. David Macey, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003). Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2007) and Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

than relations of domination, as involving the *autonomy*, and the possibility of resistance, of the one who is *assujetti* [subjected] as well.”¹⁰

Such shifts of emphasis become important in the pivotal lectures of the late 1970s, where Foucault began to unfold his notion of governmentality, the elaboration of which developed against the backdrop of his wider efforts to reform and expand the analysis of power he had developed earlier, largely under the banner of discipline. Here power is a phenomenon of those “complete and austere institutions” so richly described in *Discipline and Punish*, whose power was the power to *act on* subjects, through the optimization of forces and the perpetual exercise of their capacities. Foucault attempted to attenuate this constraint in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* and later in his lecture course of 1976-77, *Society Must Be Defended*, through an engagement with biopower as a broader exercise of power encompassing a range of extra-institutional societal deployments, centered on the very life of the population.¹¹ However, in the lecture course of the following year, *Security, Territory, Population*, the concept of biopower is quickly abandoned for an analysis of governmentality, understood not as a medico-juridical deployment, but as a state apparatus, first of popular security, and later, in his lectures of 1978-'79, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, as a technology of political and economic liberalism.¹² While there are strong arguments to be made both for a marked shift of emphasis in Foucault's work during this time (a case recently put forward by Eric Paras in *Foucault 2.0*) and for the persistence of underlying themes (as Jeffrey Nealon argues in *Foucault Beyond Foucault*), it is certainly the case that an incremental drift from discipline to biopower and ultimately governmentality is one which increasingly describes the production of subjectivity before power, or *assujetissement*, as a practice of self-formation, as the production of self-production.¹³ Or as Graham Burchell has argued: “the introduction of the idea of techniques of the self, of arts or aesthetics of existence, etc. seems to imply a loosening of the connection between subjectification and subjection”.¹⁴

Such loosening notwithstanding, within the framework of governmentality, there remains, I would argue, the powerful imprint of Foucault's genealogical study of power, and a depiction of the production of the subject before power as a fundamentally top-down process of subjection/subordination—the production of subjects but not the production of self-producing subjects.¹⁵ This is not to force a overhasty

¹⁰ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “The Aesthetic and Ascetic Dimensions of an Ethics of Self-Fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault” *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007): 55.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*.

¹² Foucault, *Security, Territory and Population* and Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

¹³ Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006) and Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and its Intensifications Since 1984* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Burchell, 20.

¹⁵ Ben Goldner, “Foucault and the Genealogy of Pastoral Power” *Radical Philosophy Review*, 10: 2 (2007): 157–176.

reduction on these two moments in Foucault's work, nor to assume that, in his work on *dispositifs*, Foucault left no room at all for a reflection on the self-forming activities of discipline, for indeed he did. Yet there is undeniably a shift of emphasis in the passage from his middle to later works, one which gradually gives increasing weight not only to the autonomy of these practices, but to the uncertainty of their outcomes. In this regard, this tendency has carried over into the expanding field of governmentality research that has emerged in recent years, wherein, as Katharyne Mitchell has argued: "the work often seems top heavy and seamless, with an inexorable and inescapable quality to the situations and transformations depicted by governmentality scholars."¹⁶

An alternative, bottom-up approach to governmentality, it would seem, would describe the negative operation of ethical work by which the rationalities of domination are extended into a program of self government itself—the actual practices of shaping, changing or negating some feature of the self. Writing several years after his pivotal lectures on governmentality, and to a very different set of concerns, Foucault described these ethical practice as processes in which "the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines this position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal."¹⁷ Moreover, an important element of such an operation could be identified in the "ethical substance," the "prime material of his moral conduct," or the raw material upon which the ethical practitioner works.¹⁸ For it is in operating on this ethical substance that the subject is both subjected to power, and enacts a practice of subjectification—an active shaping of the self as a subject. To locate the specific ambivalence operative in this point of contact, it is necessary to consider the active dynamics of self-governmental practices, the active negation of a prior ethical substance, or the work one performs on that dimension of the self one seeks to transform through government. In the case of neoliberal governmentality, this element appears, I have suggested, in the sedimented residue of earlier inscriptions of power, in the lazy predispositions to social welfare and institutional dependency that characterize the specific temporality of the poor dad.

2. The Work of Neoliberal Governmentality

For Kiyosaki, the path to riches is one that leads us through a difficult labor of self-transformation. Ostensibly written for children of poor dads, or readers who were in

¹⁶ Katharyne Mitchell, "Neoliberal Governmentality in the European Union: Education, Training, and Technologies of Citizenship" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24 (2006): 390.

¹⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

fact poor dads themselves, the text gently exhorts us to go to work on ourselves, to transform our poor dad habits into rich ones. The outlooks of the dads are described:

One dad believed in a company or in the government's taking care of you and your needs. He was always concerned about pay raises, retirement plans, medical benefits, sick leave, vacation days and other perks. He was impressed with two of his uncles who joined the military and earned a retirement and entitlement package for life after twenty years of service. He loved the idea of medical benefits and PX privileges the military provided its retirees. He also loved the tenure system available through the university. His idea of job protection for life and job benefits seemed more important, at times, than the job. He would often say, "I've worked hard for the government, and I'm entitled to these benefits." ...The other believed in total financial self-reliance. He spoke out against the "entitlement" mentality and how it was creating weak and financially needy people. He was emphatic about being financially competent.¹⁹

Poor dad's sedentary life is embodied in the flabby matter of sedimented habits and unthought routines, shaped around social trust, institutional norms and the organizational protocols of managerial hierarchy. While poor dad plodded through life in a resigned, faithful spirit, seldom questioning the doxa of financial common sense, rich dad's self-reflexive, hyper-voluntaristic outlook emphasized choice, agency, the examination of life and exercise of self-control on all levels. The transformative task to which Kiyosaki exhorts us takes the form of an exercise, the effect of which would effectively invigorate the body and the spirit by dissolving dependency and assuming full autonomy, injecting a vital life force into otherwise inactive material.

Although both dads worked hard, I noticed that one dad had a habit of putting his brain to sleep when it came to money matters, and the other had a habit of exercising his brain. The long term result was that one dad grew stronger financially and the other grew weaker. It was not much different from a person who goes on to the gym to exercise on a regular basis versus someone who sits on the couch watching television. Proper physical exercise increases your chances for health, and proper mental exercise increases your chances for wealth. Laziness decreases both health and wealth.²⁰

Exercise, in this regard, indicates the work that is performed to facilitate the circulation of vital forces within the mind and the body—a vitality that is at once a fundamental biological drive, and also a dispositional pre-requisite for neoliberal conduct.

In his lectures of 1978-79, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault spelled out the radically different ways in which classical and neoliberal thought confronted basic ques-

¹⁹ Kiyosaki, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

tions of autonomy and constraint.²¹ These differences can be briefly summarized: while classical liberalism viewed the agencies and initiatives constitutive of market conduct as generic to social life itself, from the standpoint of neoliberalism, such dispositions had to be actively fostered through state interventions. The problem confronting early liberalism in the eighteenth century was how to establish a market within and against an existing state, and how to limit the interventions of that state in order that the market could assume the dynamism and rationality to which it was naturally inclined—a process which would, if allowed to occur, enrich the state economically and militarily through the practice of governing less.²²

What distinguishes neoliberalism from classical liberalism, then, is their differing views on the naturalness of these market rationalities, and consequently their contrasting views on the role of the state in creating the conditions for market activities. In his discussion of the German post-war liberalism of the *Ordo* School, Foucault described how the problem facing liberalism in the aftermath of the Second World War was not to carve out a space of freedom within an existing state, as it was for classical liberalism.²³ Instead, the task was to devise a state capable of creating, through its own programs and initiatives, the voluntaristic, entrepreneurial and self-responsible dispositions, upon which market forms depend. Neither the market nor the competitive dispositions upon which market rationality draws, were considered *sui generis* features of social life: they had to be actively fostered through the interventions of a liberal state, whereby individuals were brought to cultivate an entrepreneurial disposition within their own modes of conduct. From this perspective, neo-liberalism is seen to invert problems long attended to by the agencies of Keynesianism and the welfare state: against the Schumpeterian orthodoxy which holds monopolistic tendencies of capitalism as an intrinsic consequence of capitalism's economic logic, *Ordo* liberals consider this a fundamentally social problem, whose remedy is open to forms of social intervention, which target the tendencies toward collectivism by aiming to ignite competitive conducts.²⁴ Blockages to economic activity originating in the social fabric, the *Ordo* liberals argued, could be negated through programs of state intervention, aimed at suppressing collectivism, and stimulating entrepreneurial, market behaviors. Practices of neoliberal governmentality express the extension of these interventionist strategies into the social field, but also into the very domain of subjectivity itself, where, as Graham Burchell has put it: "Neo-liberalism seeks in its own ways the integration of the self-conduct of the go-

²¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* and Lemke, "The Birth of Bio-Politics"—Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neoliberal Governmentality".

²² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 27-51.

²³ *Ibid.*, 183-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

verned into the practices of their government and the promotion of correspondingly appropriate forms of techniques of the self.”²⁵

Yet while Burchell and others quite adequately account for this practice of self government by which market actors produce themselves through the inscription of a certain economic rationality, he does not say what stands in the way of this operation, what inner constraints within the individual have to be broken or what material was in need of work in order that such an ethical program be realized. In other words, the work of neoliberal governmentality entails important negative programs, undertaken through an active practice of self-transformation, requiring the break up and dissolution of those sedentary collectivist dispositions and anti-competitive habits that were the accidental and periodic consequence of capitalist life itself—those very same forms of cooperative collective social life that Keynesianism and the welfare state actively sought to foster and solidify. “There is a clear sense,” writes Burchell, “in which neoliberalism is anti-society.”²⁶ To understand this negation as the active inner principle of a mode of ethics, we must better understand the ethical substance upon which this work is carried out—a substance rooted in the collectivist dispositions fostered by social government. Moreover, it is in this collectivist disposition that we discover the specific temporality, the time consciousness by which specific forms of conduct are oriented, and which appears, in the work of neoliberal governmentality, as the unique ethical substance of a practice of self-government.

3. Docility and Social Time

Clearly, rich dads and poor dads conduct themselves within radically distinct temporal frames: while poor dads practice a docile compliance to the prescribed rhythms and schedules of the institutions within which their faith is invested and their trajectories marked (poor dads, we recall, count sick days and look forward to earned vacations), rich dads, or neoliberal agents, take this docility as the specific object of an ethical program, assuming full responsibility for the temporality of their own conduct, managing risks and projecting their futures against opportunistic horizons tailored to their own unique projects. To grasp this process, we must understand the emergence of the temporality of the social both as a historical event, and as a residue accumulated in the bodies and dispositions of contemporary individuals.

Such collectivist dispositions originate with a figure of power characterized by Jacques Donzelot as “the social”—a mode of government which arose in the intervening period between classical and neoliberal forms of rule.²⁷ The social

²⁵ Burchell, 29-30.

²⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁷ Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*. Trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979). Jacques Donzelot, *L'Invention du Social* (Paris: Fayard, 1984). Jacques Donzelot, “The Promotion of the Social” *Economy and Society*, 17:3 (1988): 394–427. Jacques Donzelot,

represents a problem-space wherein the excesses of liberalism (in the form of an accelerated capitalist economy and the over-extension of market sovereignty) are held to be problematic, identified and acted upon as a force eroding other forms of popular solidarity and creating fertile ground for revolutionary challenges to capitalism itself. From the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, social government developed through a technology of rule entailing, as Mitchell Dean has described, “a set of problematizations of the liberal governmental economy (e.g., the ‘social question’, social problems, social issues), a set of institutions and practices (e.g., social welfare, social insurance, social work), a set of laws and legal jurisdictions (e.g., the juvenile court, family law) and a variety of actors, agencies and authorities (e.g., social workers, schoolteachers, police officers, general practitioners).”²⁸ The solution proposed to the problem of too much liberalism was, as Donzelot has argued in his genealogical analysis of the welfare state, the production, through state programs, of new social solidarities and new collectivist units.²⁹ Through the technology of welfare, the state assumed a function described by the French legal theorist Charles Gide as the “visible expression of the invisible bond” — an instrument for the fostering of a normative moral order amid conditions of social disintegration resulting from the atomizing effects of industrialization.³⁰ Two important features of this new technology of rule must be understood if we are to apprehend it in terms of its specific temporal dimension: first, we must point out the capacity of social government to shift responsibility for risks from individual to collectivist forms, and second, we must understand the resulting durational temporal sense that emerges from this allocation. These points will be discussed in turn.

In his *L'invention du Social*, (1984) Donzelot traces social government to a specific set of policy debates and legislative initiatives that developed in France during the nineteenth century. With an increasingly militant labor movement and the incipient threat of socialism, liberal legislators sought policies that would mitigate antagonism between labor and capital without mandating too radical an agenda of social reform. The resulting “social rights” legislation was a specific instrument of social government meant to foster solidarity, both among workers and between labor and capital more generally, as a means of ensuring social integration while blunting the specific indictment of the social order emerging from the socialist camp. Appropriating key Durkheimian themes, Donzelot describes the welfare state as one in which

“The Mobilization of Society.” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 169-179. Jacques Donzelot, “Pleasure in Work” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 251-280.

²⁸ Dean, 53.

²⁹ Donzelot, “The Promotion of the Social.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 403.

“this concept of solidarity serves to define not only the framework but also the specific mode of state intervention, one which affects the forms of the social bond rather than the structure of society itself.”³¹

Social rights legislation, Donzelot argues, extended a set of protectionist measures to workers, meant first to mitigate the specific risks and uncertainties arising from the industrial labor process (principally workplace accidents), but later applied more generally to a range of social and personal risks associated with health, fiscal security and social well being.³² In its incipient form, this displacement addressed the question of culpability for workplace accidents, whose occurrence typically became flashpoints between labor and capital. In the industrial firm of the nineteenth century, industrial accidents immediately raised difficult and often irresolvable questions of responsibility, with both bosses and workers seeking to blame each other in squabbles over compensation payments, the award of which could alternately drive owners into bankruptcy, or abandon injured workers to pauperism. The solution arrived at by social legislators was that of the “insurance technique” — a system successfully applied in Germany under Bismarck, wherein regular individual payments into a common fund served to finance compensation paid to the injured in the event of accidents.³³ Such a seemingly simple policy measure, reproduced and disseminated across a range of institutional settings, carried with it a more subtle realignment in the practice of government: the insurance technique succeeded in shifting culpability from individuals (workers or managers) to the institutional conditions of work itself. Donzelot writes:

With so many cases remaining unresolved due to the characteristic difficulty of ascribing fault to anyone, wouldn't it be better to regard accidents as effects of an unwilled collective reality, not of an individual will but effects arising from the general division of labour which, by making all actors interdependent, results in none of them having complete control over their work, or consequently being in a position to assume full responsibility.³⁴

The institutionalization of such an “unwilled collective reality” entailed the socialization of risk, relieving individuals and management of responsibility for unforeseen outcomes of their own conduct.³⁵ A swarming of welfarist agencies and services throughout the industrializing world variously seized upon this model, fashioning solutions to the problem of social disintegration and strife resulting from too much liberalism, and particularly the profusion of risks, in the form of a renewed solidarity capable of absorbing those risks into itself. Moreover, this entailed state interven-

³¹ Donzelot, “The Mobilization of Society”, 173.

³² Donzelot, “The Promotion of the Social,” 400 and Donzelot, “Pleasure in Work,” 256.

³³ Donzelot, “The Promotion of the Social,” 399.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 398.

tion aimed at the normalization and regulation of workplace conditions (and later of social conditions more generally), as it became these conditions themselves, and not the owners of capital, that were ultimately liable for risks incurred.³⁶ The application of Taylorism to the French industrial economy in the years preceding World War I is a process aimed at enhancing worker productivity, not only through the technical division of labor for which it is best known, but through the adjustment of the worker to the mosaic of normalized interpersonal relationships into which work and its risks are socialized.³⁷ Better adjustment of the worker to the normalized conditions of production reduced the risk of accidents—a key governmental objective of welfarism, yet one that substituted a collectivist, institutional responsibility for the individual culpability for output and risks. As such, life under social government was characterized by a certain docility of conduct under the normalized conditions of an engineered solidarity—a “unwilled collective reality” in which individual agency was itself no longer willed, but instead suspended within a socialized horizon of expectation, futurity and temporality.

Of course, the docile conduct into which the solidarities of social government induced its members did not originate with social rights themselves, nor did they appear with the normalized social units into which such individuals were adjusted. Such modes of conduct, and the specific temporalities through which they were enacted, were for two centuries already being quietly insinuated into the conducts of modern people through those disciplinary institutions Foucault so well documented in *Discipline and Punish*—the schools, prisons, hospitals and military barracks. Indeed, there is a specific link between the forms of social government by which risk was transposed from individual conduct to the collective responsibility of the social totality and the docile temporality of the disciplinary institution. Foucault has described the specific manner in which the production of docility is accomplished through technologies of temporalization, and specifically with the deployment of “duration” as a temporal frame.³⁸ As a durational act, the temporality of an action is not bound to its immediate outcome—the risks it entails—which have become remote from the actor, incorporated into the institutional totality within which it is executed. The time of the docile body (and by extension, the time of socialized risk) is measured simply as “duration” —as abstract, homogenous time, whose ultimate motivation and endpoint is “unwilled,” remote from the responsibilities of the actor, fixed in the remote planning schemes of the institution.

The emergence of durational time is often tied to the dissemination of clock-time in the labor process.³⁹ Linked with a wider rigidification of the intrinsic volun-

³⁶ Ibid., 412.

³⁷ Donzelot, “Pleasure in Work,” 255.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, 151.

³⁹ E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism.” *Past and Present*, 38

tarism and spontaneity that characterizes personal and social life, the notion of duration is, in historical literature on temporality, associated with the reification of the natural rhythm and meter of everyday practice, specifically for the purposes of a more thorough exploitation of the productive capacity invested in the temporality of the act.⁴⁰ E. P. Thompson's well-known study of this process uncovers the manner in which a task-oriented temporality takes over and displaces traditional temporal sensibilities tuned to the rhythms of natural processes, such as the seasonal regularities of agriculture.⁴¹ However, durational temporality is not simply a medium for the exploitation of labor: it is a means through which labor power is produced and sustained as a force, both within the individual and within the social unit as a whole.⁴² Thompson shows how the disciplining of work-time functioned as much to fashion the basis for collectivist opposition to capitalist exploitation as to ensure the conditions for the extraction of profits from the bodies or workers. Similarly, durational time is, as Donzelot has shown, a mechanism of social integration and for the formation of unwilled collective realities and de-responsibilized conducts, wherein risk is socialized and the agency of individuals is transposed from to the horizons of individual actions to those of institutional norms.

Foucault provides such an account in his detailed discussion of the production of docility in the incipient institutional temporalities of early modern societies. He describes the inscription of durational temporality as a positive operation, one that entails the decomposition of modes of conduct into administratively discreet moments, and their simultaneous recomposition in the sequence of a disciplinary practice. Foucault's account of the "temporal elaboration of the act" describes the precise manner in which an increasingly refined demarcation and segmentation of temporal units takes place in the marching instructions given to French foot soldiers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wherein the simple step of the soldier is subjected to an increasingly precise division that expands from one to four basic movements in the course of a century.⁴³ "The act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, articulations is defined; to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power."⁴⁴

This segmentation is not without aim, but neither is it specifically teleological. It is not completed with the exploitation of labor for profit, but is instead ongoing and productive, seeking as much to produce labor power as a permanent potential

(1967): 56-97 and Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1985.

⁴⁰ Zerubavel, 2-5.

⁴¹ Thompson, 61.

⁴² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, 159.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

of the individual and to articulate this potential together with the ongoing functioning of the factory, as to secure its exploitation.⁴⁵ Foucault describes the production of durational temporality: for the French foot soldier of the eighteenth century, bodily practice was reintegrated into a new docile temporality—the military march—which is directed to a new endpoint or goal, characterized by the general enhancement of productive forces, both for the individual himself, and for the institution of which he is a member. In other words, durational time acquires meaning as a permanent and ongoing exercise. “Exercise, having become an element in the political technology of the body and of duration, does not culminate in a beyond, but tends toward a subjection that has never reached its limit.”⁴⁶ As such, duration, measured by the rhythms of military training, the educational calendars of the public schools or the pay schedules imposed by the wage system, has no specific beginning and no end, and thus inscribes no agency or telos—no will. For the worker, the prisoner, the student or the soldier, the performance of a task is ongoing and often without purpose. Temporality itself has been socialized.

It was precisely this durational temporal orientation, the unwilling faithfulness to the rat race of a salaried job, that rich dad took as the object of the ethical work to which he exhorted his young student. He chastised this durational disposition for the flaccid spirit it exuded, but also for the lack of reflective awareness, the truncation of the horizons of economic action it imposed. The way out was first through the renunciation of the mind-numbing comforts supplied by such conduct, from which would follow an revitalization of one’s willingness to confront risk, and a vast expansion of the horizon of economic opportunity. One of rich dad’s lessons involved inducing the two ten-year olds to work without pay for several weekends, under the argument that the experience would teach them that salaried labor reflected a lazy and dull-minded faith in a structured reward system, and that the true reward of work lay beyond the narrow rewards of the wage system. Rich dad explained his rationale:

Keep working, boys, but the sooner you forget about needing a paycheck, the easier your adult life will be. Keep using your brain, work for free, and soon your mind will show you ways of making money far beyond what I could ever pay you. You will see things that other people never see. Opportunities right in front of their noses. Most people never see these opportunities because they’re looking for money and security, so that’s all they get. The moment you see one opportunity, you will see them for the rest of your life. ⁴⁷

The awakening intended by this exercise was one that was meant to turn the two boys to work on themselves—on the traces and residues, the inscribed habits and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁷ Kiyosaki, 50.

dispositions remaining from an earlier deployment of a collective social reality, and the displacement of responsibility and risk it entailed. The social, durational temporalities that are the residue of docility and durational time can be identified, not just in the generational rift between poor dads and their sons, but in the historical sedimentations accumulated in the bodies of those sons themselves, and in the readers to whom Kiyosaki appeals—a body that, as Foucault wrote in his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, can be understood as the repository of historical inscriptions, or as he put it, the “inscribed surface of events.” Indeed, it is in this work that the ambivalence between the institutional forms of self-government, and the individual practices of self-rule, or subjection and subjectification, becomes operative.

4. Conclusion: Temporality and Counter-Conduct

The emphasis placed here on the work of neoliberal subjectification has indicated the need to consider the ambivalence between subjection and subjectification, or the “loose fit” between power and the subject. So far, however, little has been said of the specific content of this ambivalence, or of the general forms it might take. Of what, then, might this ambivalence consist? How is the work one performs on residual durational temporalities, the ethical substances of social conduct, or the residual inscriptions of Donzelot’s “unwilled collective reality” to be practiced differently? I will close with a very general and brief suggestion for the direction in which such a study might move—a purpose for which it is useful to consult Foucault’s discussion of what he termed “counter-conduct,” or the tactical reversals to which rationalities of governmentality are prone.

Arguments for the tactical reversibility of clock-time as a technology of domination in the capitalist labor process are not unfamiliar: Thompson has described the process by which, a generation after the appearance of clocks in the labor process, struggles increasingly took place within the framework of scheduled labor: “[workers] had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well.”⁴⁸ Yet the notion of a temporal counter-conduct within neoliberal governmentality requires that we move beyond Thompson’s analysis of time as an instrument in the exploitation of labor, to a consideration of temporality as an object in the ongoing and open-ended practice of government, or as the self-forming work of subjectification itself.

Foucault’s many statements on practices of resistance need not be rehearsed here, save to point out some elements that are relevant to our effort to understand the neoliberal government of temporality as a practice characterized by ambivalence and tactical reversal. Toward this end, two points will be made, the first concerning the persistence of earlier temporal sensibilities in the conducts of individuals. In his

⁴⁸ Thompson, 91.

statements on counter-memory and counter-history, Foucault describes the manner in which “subjugated knowledges” are carried over from previous, now forgotten struggles, “left to lie fallow, or even kept at the margins” of the body and in everyday rationalities that shape conduct, yet which contained “the memory of combats, the very memory that had until then been confined to the margins.”⁴⁹ What I have described here as the residual temporalities of social conduct that appear as ethical substances in the work of neoliberal governmentality, share important features with such subjugated knowledges: to do the work of neoliberal governmentality differently is to engage differently the sedimented memory of social time that is the ethical substance of neoliberal governmentality, to engage this trace, not through a practice of disaggregation and responsabilization, but through a reactivation and redeployment of the “unwilled collective reality” that is the fabric of social time.

A second point derives from the idea of “counter-conducts,” or revolts of conduct, which Foucault elaborated in his lectures of 1977-78, and through which practices of government can be understood in terms of their own potential for reversal. Counter-conducts, Foucault explains, are distinguished from economic revolts against power (such as those described by Thompson), by their emphasis on the government of the self as the stake of revolt, and the specific rejection, through inversion and reversal, of the precise ways in which one is told that one should govern oneself. Counter-conducts emerge from within the specific logics of a given mode of conduct, inverting the series that runs from the macro-level technologies of rule to the specific ethical practices by which individuals rule themselves. Foucault describes the “pastoral counter-conducts” developed in opposition to ecclesiastical rule during the medieval period, illustrated by the Flagellants, for whom extreme forms of asceticism took up specific features of Christian pastoral governance, while redeploing them in practices that were ultimately antagonistic to the pastoral establishment itself.⁵⁰

Similarly, temporal counter-conducts within neoliberal governmentality might choose to practice differently certain tenets of neoliberal rule, specifically the mandate to assume agency, to responsabilize oneself and to orient one’s actions within a temporal horizon specifically conceived around one’s own enterprising conduct. In doing so, such conducts might operate upon the ethical substance defined by the residual docility of social time in a manner opposed to that which it was intended by power. Rather than inscribing an individualizing responsibility through the temporality of personal conduct, neoliberal counter-conduct might undertake to transpose that responsibility elsewhere, to undertake the work of an unwilled conduct, of not acting, or withholding agency, of refusing to project one’s conduct into the opportunistic temporal horizons that characterize the entrepreneurial outlook—the initiative to which rich dad inspired us. The temporal counter-conducts of neoliberalism

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 8.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 207.

might, instead of shaping new temporalities around the radical responsabilizing of one's own conduct, remobilize the subjugated memory of poor dad's unique penchant for the unwilling life, recovering the capacity for inaction, irresponsibility and the refusal to seek out opportunity. Indeed, it is possible that such moments of counter-conduct punctuate the everyday lives of individuals in contemporary neoliberal societies. An illuminating example comes from the rising psycho-social phenomenon of procrastination—a cresting lifestyle affliction affecting larger numbers every year and garnering around itself an ever more verbose clinical discourse and practice, suggests some ways in which exhortations to self-responsibilization might provoke unique counter-conducts. Procrastination, recent studies have shown, is increasingly evident in public and private life, ever more present in the lives of students, spouses, taxpayers, politicians and professionals.⁵¹ In a 2007 study published in *Psychological Bulletin*, Piers Steel describes the growing prevalence of procrastination: among the general population, 15%-20% consider themselves procrastinators, while among college students the figure is much higher, reaching 75%, almost 50% of whom procrastinate “consistently and problematically.”⁵² Within the clinical literature on procrastination, the phenomenon is defined in strictly utilitarian terms: “procrastination is most often considered to be the irrational delay of behavior,” where rationality entails “choosing a course of action despite expecting that it will not maximize your utilities, that is, your interests, preferences, or goals of both a material (e.g., money) and a psychological (e.g., happiness) nature.”⁵³

Indeed, procrastination has become a growing topic in the self-help literature category, described in books with suggestive titles such as *Do It Now: Breaking the Procrastination Habit*,⁵⁴ and *The Procrastination Workbook: Your Personalized Program for Breaking Free from the Patterns That Hold You Back*;⁵⁵ *The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play*,⁵⁶ and *The Procrastinator's Handbook: Mastering the Art of Doing It Now*.⁵⁷ A description of the procrastinator's disposition is offered:

The power of procrastination erupts from deep within. It often masquerades as a friend. “Let it wait,” we hear ourselves say, “for when you feel rested, you'll fly

⁵¹ Piers Steel, “The Nature of Procrastination: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-Regulatory Failure” *Psychology Bulletin*, 133, 1 (2007): 65–94.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁴ William Knaus, *Do It Now: Breaking the Procrastination Habit*, revised edition (New York: Wiley, 1997).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Neil Fiore, *The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play*, revised edition (New York: Tarcher, 2007).

⁵⁷ Rita Emmet, *The Procrastinator's Handbook: Mastering the Art of Doing It Now* (New York: Walker & Company, 2000).

through these tasks to create a tomorrow that all will envy." This is one of those procrastination paradoxes, where a soothing idea has hidden barbs. You feel relief when you think you can later gain command over what you currently don't want to do. The barb is found in practicing a negative pattern of retreat. When you procrastinate you needlessly postpone, delay, or put off a relevant activity until another day or time. When you procrastinate, you *always* substitute an alternative activity for the relevant one. The alternative activity may be almost as timely or important as the one you put off. But more likely, it will be irrelevant, such as daydreaming instead of writing a report. ⁵⁸

In closing, and by way of illustration, I offer procrastination as just one opening into the wider question of the contemporary practice of temporal counterconduct within the context of neoliberal governmentality. It is possible to read the choice to "let it wait," so antithetical to the rich dad's swaggering self-responsibility, as a specific ambivalence within the production of the neoliberal subject as a self-producing subject. The unwilling of procrastination calls back to the unwilled realities of durational temporality, cultivated in the collectivist time of social governance, and in the docile time of the disciplinary society, here worked differently, mobilized as a day-dream, against the writing of reports.

⁵⁸ Knaus, 8.