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UK Lockdown Governmentalities: What Does It Mean to Govern in 2020?

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ABSTRACT. Focusing on the United Kingdom, this paper examines the mechanisms of 2020's 'lockdown' strategy from a governmental perspective, with 'governmentality' being defined as the art of, or rationale behind, governing populations at a given time. By investigating a series of recent imperatives given to the population by the UK government, and comparing these with the previously dominant form of governmentality (neoliberalism), I hope to shed light on some new features of the current art of government. Indeed, the paper argues that neoliberalism is no longer the dominant form of governmentality in the UK, although some important legacies remain. I therefore argue that new forms of governmentality have risen to prominence. In particular, I use the concept of 'algorithmic governmentality' to address features of lockdown subjectivity and economy, such as the 'doppelgänger logic' of consumption and production, as well as the government's attempts to continuously manage and re-manage the population based on biometric data. However, I also show that this concept does not adequately encompass contemporary realities of surveillance, exposition and coercion. As such, I introduce 'instrumentarian governmentality' to denote the use of digital surveillance instruments to control the behaviour of the population. Additionally, the term is intended to denote an 'authoritarian' turn in the ways in which people are governed. Overall, what it means to govern in 2020 is posited as a fluctuating composite of three key forms of governmentality: *neoliberal*, *algorithmic*, and *instrumentarian*.

Keywords: Governmentality, Foucault, Lockdown, Neoliberalism, Surveillance

INTRODUCTION

'Lockdown,' a governmental strategy introduced by many countries around the world in 2020, could have massive implications for future society. Specifically, this paper examines the implications for the art of government itself. Indeed, 'governmentality' is defined as

the specific art of, or rationale behind, governing populations at a given time. Governmentality, however, also “implies the relationship of the self to itself,”¹ and in fact these two spheres, governing the self and governing others, are connected through the term ‘governmentality’ - a connection which bears obvious relevance to the various social conducts produced by lockdown.

By comparing the dominant governmentality in the UK as of 2019 (neoliberalism) with various contemporary government imperatives and their impacts, I hope to address the question of what it currently means to govern in the UK. A growing digital industrial complex² is what renders many features of lockdown governmentality logistically possible, so this recurs as a theme throughout. In order to initially identify *neoliberal governmentality*'s key characteristics, the paper opens with a ‘genealogy’ of the term. Genealogy here is seen as an historical investigation of “that which we feel is without history.”³ As highlighted by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*, neoliberalism had indeed become naturalised as the only legitimate governmental rationale in early 21st century Britain.⁴ However, it is worth questioning whether neoliberalism is now undergoing a transition towards being primarily an object of historical inquiry rather than being an umbrella term for various theories which clamour to describe our present. I suggest that, instead of continually extending the definition of neoliberalism further and further away from its original tenets, we should accept that it is no longer the *dominant* form of governmentality in the UK as of 2020.

Drawing primarily on Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, the key characteristics of neo-liberal governmentality are separated from liberal governmentality as follows: firstly, ‘the market’ as a site of truth and justice production, and the extension of its economic logic to *all* realms of social life; secondly, within this framework of economic logic, a transition from *exchange* to *competition* as the primary governmental force; thirdly, ‘the rule of law’ (*l'État de droit*) as a means of cultivating an *Enterprise Society*; fourthly, as a result of these initial three phenomena, the production of the self-assessing entrepreneurial subject, or *homo oeconomicus* (‘economic man’).

The extent to which these neoliberal characteristics have persisted, contracted, expanded or ceased is then tested in relation to various imperatives of current UK government policy. Novel aspects of lockdown governmentality are thereby located. Firstly, ‘Stay Home. Save Lives.’ The economic implications of the at-home lifestyle are explored, with emphasis on the damaging of independent businesses and livelihoods as a result of lockdown; ‘furlough’ payments, injection provision and unlock deadlines as evidence of economic planning; widespread economic digitisation and its production of monopolies; and the overall lack of competition, especially within digital platform markets. I then

¹ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984* (2020), 305-6.

² Kim McKechney, “The Perils of the Growing Digital Industrial Complex,” *University Affairs*, February 14, 2017. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/growing-digital-industrial-complex/>

³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (1984), 76.

⁴ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), 1-12.

highlight the 'behavioural surplus' data generated from digital activity; the emergent *algorithmic governmentality* which results from such an abundance of information; the subsequent exercise of 'instrumentarian power' by corporations and governments; and finally, what I call *instrumentarian governmentality*: the use of digital surveillance instruments to produce affective responses, individually and within the population, for engineering predetermined political outcomes. Secondly, 'Maintain Social Distancing. Avoid Large Gatherings.' Positioned within this digitised economy, lockdown subjectivity is explored, with an emphasis on the transition from neoliberal self-entrepreneur to consumption connoisseur; the role of 'doppelgänger logic' and desire in this process; the algorithmic interrogation of desire to produce incisive data for future instrumentarian use; and the targeting of individuals as 'dangerous.' Various difficulties in pursuing a 'self-entrepreneurial subjectivity' are identified, such as apathy and mental health issues produced by isolation; theories of human capital - consumption not as self-production but as behavioural surplus production-for-others; mediated knowledge, 'epistemic precarity,' and the diminishing quality of digital knowledge production. Subsequently, I question the apparent alignment of corporate and government interests; the selective application of illiberal policing; and the individuation and regulation of truth. Finally, 'Control the Virus. Save Lives.' Continuing the examination of the role of truth, specifically the proliferation of biometric data; 'information flooding' as a strategy for controlling and managing the virus; the productive but dangerous possibilities of a digital health passport; the ongoing integration of biometric data into the existing surveillance network; and instrumentarian control as the binary modulation of reward and punishment in relation to socially desirable behaviour.

I conclude that, while a number of its legacies still persist, neoliberal governmentality is no longer the dominant form of governmentality in the UK, as of 2020. In terms of answering the question of what it therefore means to govern, 'algorithmic governmentality' is explored as a key feature but is considered too benign a term since it does not adequately address contemporary realities of surveillance, exposition and coercion. As a result, the word *instrumentarian* is borrowed from Shoshana Zuboff to develop a notion of governmentality that implies both the use of digital surveillance instruments to control the behaviour of the population, as well as an 'authoritarian' mentality. In sum, 'lockdown governmentality' is posited as being a 'provisional,' fluctuating composite of three key forms of governmentality: *neoliberal*, *algorithmic* and *instrumentarian*.

A BRIEF GENEALOGY OF NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

Before examining what has changed so drastically in 2020, we need to highlight the key aspects of the previously dominant governmental rationale: neoliberalism. While many of its core ideals can be traced back to eighteenth century liberalism, there are some important distinctions which need to be made. Notably, the focus on *competition* rather than *exchange* as the guiding principle for market activity; *enterprise* as the dominant organisational and behavioural form ('The Enterprise Society') - cultivated through *The Rule of Law*

(*L'État de Droit*); and the subsequent formation of the *homo oeconomicus* as the ideal neoliberal subject.

Liberal Governmentality

According to Foucault, the genesis of liberalism can be associated with the genesis of governmentality itself - since the former embodies a perpetual suspicion of the 'risk of governing too much.' Hence, there emerged a continuous need for self-reflection upon governmental practice, which was concerned not merely with the question of how best to govern - but more fundamentally - the question of the very necessity of government itself.⁵ In the second and third lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault identifies the defining characteristics of the 'liberal' art of government. He argues that the style of 'frugal government,' associated with liberalism and neo-liberalism, had originally been inspired by a set of historically established economic truths. He emphasises that, from the eighteenth century onward, a *regime of truth* had been built up around the activities of the marketplace. Crucially, the market became seen as a site of justice. Its rules, after all, governed the *right* price, the *fair* distribution of goods, and the elimination of *fraud*. Its integration of supply, demand, value, growth etc. into a single system made it a fitting "site of verification-falsification for governmental practice."⁶ Hence the rationale for governing became increasingly aligned with the 'common sense' logic of the marketplace.

An anecdote from UK neoliberalism, which exemplifies a continuation of this rationale, was Margaret Thatcher's use of her background, as a grocer's daughter, to illustrate both her suitability for government and the moral superiority of liberal capitalism.⁷ The market, therefore, has become increasingly seen as a neutral site of truth and justice. As shown by the Thatcher example, the individual qualities of productivity, industriousness and honest participation in the marketplace began to attract a moral value. Historically, this had also been a feature of liberalism, with the almost religious cultivation of a liberal capitalist *spirit* having famously been explored by Weber.⁸ Overall, the emphasis on a rationale, morality, or regime of truth surrounding market activity demonstrates a degree of continuity between liberal and neoliberal governmentality.

Foucault on Neo-Liberal Governmentality

However, as Foucault demonstrates, neo-liberalism should not simply be seen as a revival of classical liberalism. Theoretical schools such as the German 'ordoliberal' and the Chicago neo-liberals made a series of key modifications to the original liberal rationale. Notably, neoliberalism sees competition, rather than exchange, as the primary governmental or structuring force behind market activity. While classical liberals such as Adam Smith

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79* (2008), 319.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-32.

⁷ John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: Volume One: The Grocer's Daughter* (2007), 1-30, 377.

⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2005).

focused on theorising situations of *equal* exchange between two parties,⁹ Foucault claims that ordoliberalism sought to analyse and maximise the key benefits arising from *inequality* in the market, i.e., competition. As such, ordoliberal thinkers saw 'pure competition' as the primary objective for governmental practice. Rather than seeing competition as a 'natural' quality inherent within the marketplace, ordoliberalism encouraged a more *active* governmentality which sought to cultivate competition while avoiding or strictly regulating monopolies.¹⁰ According to Foucault, the neo-liberal state's legal interventions in the economy should only take the form of designing principles, frameworks, or 'rules of a game,' rather than pursuing definitive ends or goals (i.e., a planned economy). Citing Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*, he notes the relationship of *l'État de droit*, or *The Rule of Law*, to the 'Enterprise Society.' The rule of law, Foucault argues, was developed to limit centralised state decision-making, to oppose the police state, and to enable enterprising behaviour.¹¹ In the ordoliberal context, it was developed as a response to the abuses of the supra-legal Nazi state,¹² aiming to reconstitute the state as a legal subject by providing an impartial arbiter between the state and the people (rather than courts just acting as another arm of public authority).

More generally, this would correspond with the notion of a neoliberal *nomos*, or 'normative order,' presented by Lemm and Vatter. This is posited as somewhere between rigidly imposed laws and a more nebulous socio-cultural order. Specifically, Thomas Lemke notes that this order operates through (or cultivates and encourages) freedom rather than obedience.¹³ We should contrast this with the lockdown tendency to enforce laws which restrict minute individual behaviours and rely on large scale obedience. It is also worth highlighting his argument that immanent to liberalism's production of freedom is its production of danger (of precarity, unemployment, poverty, etc.).¹⁴ Conversely, in lockdown's attempts to totally avoid danger, it ends up obliterating freedom.

⁹ While he has retrospectively been named the 'father' of liberal economics, Adam Smith would have referred to himself as a 'moral philosopher', and a lesser-known work of his, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments: Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith Vol. I* (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1982), concerns itself largely with an exploration of social relations (i.e., various *exchanges* between people). In particular, his concept of 'Sympathy,' exemplified by the chapter: 'Of the Pleasure of mutual Sympathy' (pages 55-57), emphasises the centrality of mutual understanding to human relationships, and could be seen to directly contravene the notion, now often associated with neo-liberalism and free market economics, that people act inherently out of self-interest or are selfish beings by nature. [Thank you to my former history lecturer Claudia Stein for this more specialised piece of information.] This reflects the shift in emphasis from 'equality' to 'inequality,' or from 'exchange' to 'competition,' as the primary tool for modeling market interaction, that Foucault identifies as a key transition from liberal to neo-liberal governmentality.

¹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), 118-121, 166.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172-175.

¹² *Ibid.*, 116.

¹³ Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds., *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics and Neoliberalism* (2014), 5-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

Late UK Neoliberalism

Foucault's 'neo-liberal governmentality' is not exactly the same as the 'neoliberal governmentality' which has been widely analysed since his death. Michael Behrent notes that, since Foucault died in 1984, he was not alive to witness neoliberalism's development into a system of domination.¹⁵ Structural inequality and precarity – core characteristics of post-Fordist labour relations – are perhaps only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the abuses of the neoliberal regime. Naturally, they are experiences associated with the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, which is a crucial area of development between Foucault's early appreciation of neo-liberalism and our more familiar, recent realities. As Lorenzini highlights, the figure of the *homo oeconomicus* is critical for distinguishing neoliberal from classical liberal governmentality.¹⁶ Foucault defines the *homo oeconomicus* through the uniquely neoliberal tendency to analyse all social actors, rather than just marketplace actors, through an economic lens.¹⁷ Rather than 'leave the market to itself,' it has come to dominate all spheres of social life. Mark Fisher, for example, laments the 'business ontology' of late UK neoliberalism, "in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business."¹⁸ This assessment was foreshadowed by Foucault's analyses of the 'Enterprise society', in which the ideal organisational form – including for governments – was the model of the enterprise.¹⁹

Lorenzini applies this governmental logic to individual subjects. Instead of the *laissez-faire* mentality advertised by both systems, neoliberalism actively transforms people into subjects who are eminently manageable, governable and modifiable.²⁰ Indeed, the ideal neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is identified by Foucault not as the avid consumer but as "the man of enterprise and production."²¹ De Beistegui highlights a similar process in which one's everyday skills and attributes are made sense of as forms of capital for marketing oneself as a unit of labour. As such, the traditional conceptual boundary between labour and capital has been erased,²² creating a situation of economic precarity in which work time and leisure time become increasingly confused.²³ Bröckling investigates this figure of the 'self-entrepreneur' further, arguing that it does not actually exist but is a 'real fiction:' something that *ought* to exist. Neoliberal subjects are thereby governed through a process of continuous self-evaluation and modification in relation to this ideal.²⁴ The over-

¹⁵ Michael C. Behrent and Daniel Zamora, eds., *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (2016), 191-199.

¹⁶ Daniele Lorenzini, "Governmentality, Subjectivity and the Neoliberal Form of Life," *Journal for Cultural Research* 22:2 (2018), 154-166.

¹⁷ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 267-268.

¹⁸ Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (2009), 17.

¹⁹ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 241.

²⁰ Lorenzini, "Governmentality, Subjectivity, and the Neoliberal Form of Life," 154-166.

²¹ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 147.

²² Miguel de Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject* (2018), 77-78.

²³ Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (2016), 20-21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

all atmosphere of cut-throat competition, constant self-appraisal, precarious flux, and resultant economic inequality is undoubtedly characteristic of late neoliberalism. Fisher argues that "in many ways, the left has never recovered from being wrong-footed by Capital's mobilization and metabolization of the desire for emancipation from Fordist routine."²⁵ This coincides with Deleuze's definitions of control society - a move away from the disciplinary enclosures and routines described by Foucault towards permanent retraining and more generalised market participation.²⁶ Likely a knock-on effect of this gradual dissolution of job security, Fisher also emphasises neoliberalism's interest in the "chemico-biologization" of widespread mental illness (rather than its *politicisation* – consciously linking it to systemic causes).²⁷ Lockdown has offered a resounding final note on this debate, clearly in favour of the latter explanation, albeit for largely different reasons.

Most notable for our inquiry are Fisher's insights regarding the 'market Stalinism' and 'bureaucratic anti-production' emergent within late UK neoliberalism. Obviously, these phenomena do not fall under any traditional definition of neoliberalism, and certainly were not among the characteristics explored by Foucault. As Fisher highlights, the 2008 financial crisis might have signaled the collapse of neoliberalism, but the propping up of banking corporations by the state only served to reinforce the notion that 'there is no alternative.'²⁸ Harvey notes that the involvement of the state in neoliberal society has always been somewhat ambiguous, giving examples of natural monopoly and market failure as cases for necessary intervention.²⁹ This reminds us of the ordoliberal ideal, which promoted active state involvement to cultivate competition and avoid monopoly. A divergence can be seen here between neo-liberal theory and 'neoliberal' practice, both of which encourage state involvement, but the latter, especially since 2008, has done so to protect monopoly and stymie competition. Some things, as the late neoliberal rationale would have it, are 'too big to fail.'

Since Foucault's lectures, neoliberalism itself has undoubtedly undergone many changes. Especially since 2008, various theories have proliferated, expanding neoliberalism's definition ever further, to match those changes.³⁰ However, with the benefit of 2020 hindsight, should we consider the state-corporate nexus that has been developing since 2008 (and perhaps even earlier) as neoliberalism per se? As May & McWhorter emphasise, in their exploration of changing power structures, "the new does not replace but rather develops alongside the old."³¹ What, therefore, has been quietly developing alongside neoliberal governmentality, while the latter has predominantly stolen the spotlight, until

²⁵ *Capitalist Realism*, 34.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992), 3-7.

²⁷ *Capitalist Realism*, 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), 64-68.

³⁰ Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian and Philip Mirowski, eds., *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (2020).

³¹ Todd May and Ladelle McWhorter, "Who's Being Disciplined Now? Operations of Power in a Neoliberal World," in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, ed. Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar (2016), 246.

now? Part of the task of this article is to offer an answer to that question. Of course, neoliberalism has not disappeared altogether - far from it. Yet I will argue that under lockdown it ceases to be the *dominant* form of governmentality in the UK, largely due to unprecedented levels of state involvement in everyday life, the subsequent reduction in (self-)entrepreneurial possibility, evidence of economic planning, and an overall lack of market competition.

STAY HOME. SAVE LIVES.

Foucault notes that during a plague outbreak in a seventeenth century town, it was forbidden to leave “on pain of death.”³² Insofar as he highlights the difference between pre-modern societies and disciplinary societies, today we are not threatened with a death penalty. Rather, we are implored to search our own conscience and to conclude that we risk being a danger to ourselves, our loved ones, and other members of society, should we choose to venture outside. The threat of death still exists, but in a more subtle way. It is used to induce docility into the population as a whole, instead of targeting specific individuals for punishment. In this sense, the strategy could be seen as a persistence of neoliberal biopower since it encourages self-examination as a means of population management.³³ However, while directives are given to the population *en masse*, the specific strategies for governing noticeably comprise efforts to reshape the minutiae of social interaction - techniques for regimenting individual behaviour that are typical of disciplinary power. The abundance of information, concerning both individual behaviour and trends within the population at large, allows for this sense in which disciplinary power and biopower have been digitally fused to produce a totalising effect. To make use of this refined, yet expansive information, *algorithmic governmentality* has become increasingly prevalent, with the decision to lock down itself being exemplary of this rationale. In conjunction with this, a number of policies linked to lockdown's *stay at home* directive have created an economic situation that can no longer be described as merely 'neoliberal.' Almost entirely digitised, the resultant lockdown economy stifles entrepreneurial possibility, centralises decision-making, and fosters an overall lack of competition – embodied by so-called ‘data-opolies.’

One of the characteristics of liberal governmentality emphasised by Foucault was governing with maximum growth or economic activity as a guiding principle, i.e., “the internal rule of maximum economy.”³⁴ Neo-liberalism arguably strengthened this mentality even further within its notion that the market economy should inform and regulate state practices (rather than the other way around).³⁵ By this standard, the originally proposed

³² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), 195.

³³ Although, it must be said that since the initial writing of this essay, the approach has moved even further towards outright imposition and enforcement, with self-examination being relegated to a supplementary role.

³⁴ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

policy of ‘herd immunity’ could be considered a far more ‘neoliberal’ option than the shutting down of physical society, since the prospect of such widespread economic desolation would likely have been considered too heinous by a market-driven rationale. In the case of lockdown, the digital infrastructure that enabled an algorithmic governmentality of ‘suppression’ presented a scope and scale for population management so paradigm shattering that woolly and unscientific ‘ethical implications’³⁶ were considered superfluous to the immutable march of progress - and so were left behind - presumably somewhere alongside institutions such as freedom of movement, choice and speech.

The Lockdown Economy

The UK government’s instruction to *stay at home* has consolidated the primacy of data as the most valuable commodity, a trend which began under neoliberalism. Since most transactions take place from home, and those which do not have turned cashless, the marketplace has essentially been digitised. As Harcourt describes, even activities which are not ostensibly transactions, such as searching the web, watching a video, or swiping the door to work (logging in equals clocking in) all leave a permanent digital trace. Taken together, this constitutes a vast web of highly specific information recorded about each individual, hence the emergent concept of the ‘digital self.’³⁷ This is perfectly captured by a 2017 advertisement for Experian UK, in which an individual is permanently followed by “a physical manifestation of [their] financial history,” or ‘data self.’ The ad hints at the attempted infiltration of this figure into extremely private spheres such as the bedroom, which suggests the extensive and personal nature of data now held about us.³⁸ Harcourt even supposes that this composite digital footprint has become more tangible than our analog selves, with all of our aggregated data producing a “sketch of what we like, whom we love, what we read, how we vote and where we protest.”³⁹ Further to being more ‘tangible’ and ‘provable,’ it is also worth noting the sense in which our digital selves are now seen as ‘safer,’ and thus more appropriate for market participation, than the ‘riskier,’ chaotic and supposedly hazardous ‘self’ as biological organism or human animal. Indeed, it is estimated that 62% of the UK workforce are currently *working from home*.⁴⁰

The notorious ‘furlough’ programme further encapsulates this rationale. Its official title, ‘The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme,’⁴¹ carries with it a certain twisted irony. Many

³⁶ Neil M. Ferguson, Daniel Laydon, Gemma Nedjati-Gilani et. al., “Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand,” *Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team* (2020).

³⁷ Bernard E. Harcourt, *Exposed: Desire and Disobedience in the Digital Age* (2015), 1-3.

³⁸ Experian UK, “Experian TV Ad 2017 - Meet Your Data Self,” YouTube video, 1:00, December 26, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnAiokZ20PU>

³⁹ Harcourt, *Exposed* (2015), 1.

⁴⁰ “Lockdown loneliness & the collapse of social life at work,” totaljobs.com, August 17, 2020.

<https://www.totaljobs.com/advice/lockdown-loneliness-the-collapse-of-social-life-at-work> (accessed February 8, 2021).

⁴¹ HM Revenue & Customs, “Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme,” gov.uk, May 15, 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme> (accessed June 3, 2020).

traditional, 'physical' industries have been obliterated by lockdown, and with them, 7.6 million jobs (24% of the UK workforce) are under threat.⁴² Specific to lockdown is the severe economic pressure on any firm, organisation or individual who cannot at least partially digitise or find a role within the digital marketplace. Far from encouraging enterprising behaviour, or cultivating an 'Enterprise Society,' the current *Rule of Law* attempts to restrict physical transactions deemed 'non-essential.' McKinsey & Co.'s report, concerning lockdown's effect on jobs, notes that "the impact across sectors is highly uneven" - emphasising that 73% of workers in accommodation and food services have been furloughed, compared with 13% in information and communication.⁴³ Ease of incorporation into the digital economy seems to be the common factor shared by those industries which have thrived during, or at least emerged unscathed from, lockdown. Unsurprisingly, it seems that larger firms have adapted better to furlough-induced digitisation, whether this be due to: prior ability to invest in technology; larger cash reserves to weather such an unprecedented storm; or greater ease in adopting the explosion of regulations regarding 'workplace safety.'⁴⁴ These restrictions significantly impair the ability of those unable to *work from home* to produce wealth, and therefore, for many people, self-entrepreneurial subjectivity is a much more difficult state of being to pursue. Any remaining traces of neoliberal (self-)entrepreneurship can be found within the digital economy. Yet, even before lockdown, the state of competition in digital platform markets was subject to intense scrutiny. Such markets are prone to upward concentration due to the ease of integrating acquisitions into existing networks and benefits subsequently gained by accumulating large databases. Ducci even compares digital platforms to natural monopolies since many share the common attribute of higher fixed costs versus lower variable costs.⁴⁵ With greater returns as scale increases, smaller firms struggle to compete, and hence there is a 'natural' inclination towards monopoly. Crucially, Ezrachi & Stucke warn: "The potential harms from data-opolies can exceed those of earlier monopolies. They can affect not only our wallets but our privacy, autonomy, democracy and well-being."⁴⁶ Their statement draws attention to key issues raised by this paper, but in the context of this section, most important perhaps is an emphasis on the *centralisation of decision-making* (which is an implicit feature of monopoly).

⁴² Tera Allas, Mark Canal and Vivian Hunt, "COVID-19 in the United Kingdom: Assessing jobs at risk and the impact on people and places," *McKinsey & Company*, May 11, 2020.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Public%20and%20Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/COVID%2019%20in%20the%20United%20Kingdom%20Assessing%20jobs%20at%20risk%20and%20the%20impact%20on%20people%20and%20places%20new/COVID-19-in-the-United-Kingdom-VF.pdf?shouldIndex=false>

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴⁴ UK Health Security Agency, "Reducing the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, in the workplace," gov.uk, April 10, 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

⁴⁵ Francesco Ducci, *Natural Monopolies in Digital Platform Markets* (2020).

⁴⁶ Ariel Ezrachi and Maurice E. Stucke, "eDistortions: How Data-opolies are Dissipating the Internet's Potential," in *Digital Platforms and Concentration*, ed. Guy Rolnik (2018), 6.

So the government's *stay at home* policy, aimed at 'saving lives,' when viewed from another angle, could be seen as producing the opposite effect - through widespread damage to independent businesses and livelihoods. Importantly, McKinsey highlight that individuals and areas with lower income have been disproportionately affected – nearly 50% of all at-risk jobs are those which earn less than £10 per hour.⁴⁷ Widespread automation and digitisation, now vastly accelerated by furlough, will likely lead to an increased dependence on state income, especially within this demographic.

This ultimately amounts to a further centralisation of decision-making, which, while more 'algorithmic' than the bureaucracies of the past, is nonetheless analogous to economic planning. Hayek's comments about the misleading assurances from economic planners, namely that the state will dictate 'only economic matters,'⁴⁸ resonates with the terms and conditions being attached to state-controlled incomes today. The contemporary phrase "No job. No job."⁴⁹ is all that is needed to illustrate this point. Once the state controls your income, it controls the conditions attached to receiving it, and from here the question of 'merely economic' control has quickly transfigured itself to threaten equally fundamental concerns such as body sovereignty, autonomy and privacy. 'Economic planning' can also be seen in the specific ultimatums and dates given to the public for coming out of lockdown. While these might not conform to our preconceived images of economic planning, they nonetheless represent centralised management of the entire economy by state authority. Indeed, Hayek sees the pursuit of definitive goals or targets as characteristic of a planned economy. Of interest to us, too, is his inclusion of 'the encouragement of specific consumptive forms' under this definition.⁵⁰ Could lockdown's goal, plan or target be seen as an encouragement of digitised consumption?

Algorithmic governmentality,⁵¹ a rationale which seeks to utilise the overwhelming abundance of information, generated through digital activity, has been consolidated by lockdown. The term is also employed by Erb and Ganahl, who emphasise that vast information collections can now be used to predict and modify user-consumers' future behaviour. They highlight in particular the ability to instantly create individualised, interactive interfaces for each user.⁵² So, in this sense, rather than govern according to the rules of the market per se, lockdown economics is characterised by the bespoke flexibility of post-Fordism taken to its digital extreme. Abundant information extends Foucault's notion that the market produces justice - by further revealing, exposing and regulating the behaviour of consumers and producers. In theory, with symmetrical information, this could foster

⁴⁷ Allas, Canal, and Hunt, "COVID-19 in the United Kingdom," 2.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (2001), 91-95.

⁴⁹ BBC News, "Coronavirus: 'No job, no job' policies may be legal for new staff," February 18, 2021.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56113366>

⁵⁰ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 172.

⁵¹ Antoinette Rouvroy, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Death of Politics," *Green European Journal* (2020).

⁵² Richard Weiskopf, "Algorithmic Decision-Making, Spectrogenic Profiling and Hyper-Facticity in the Age of Post-Truth," *Le foucauldien*, 6:1 (2020), 1-37.

just economic relations - an idealised extension of post-Fordism - in which producers possess sufficient information to fully cater for demand, while consumers enjoy bespoke products at a reasonable price. 'Perfect Information' has been a utopian market condition long sought after by economists. Harcourt argues that this configuration contributes to *doppelgänger logic*, a constantly evolving process which attempts to match the subject with their 'perfect' digital partner (be this an actual partner, or a book, film, experience, etc.);⁵³ or, to follow the antecedent market logic, a perfect match between consumer and producer. Through this *doppelgänger logic*, digitisation can lead to 'disintermediation' or 'cutting out the middleman,' which can circumvent the role of traditional suppliers. Amazon is a prime example of this: consumers can buy a variety of products directly through Amazon's digital platform, thereby bypassing many of the former stages within the supply chain.

However, the outcome we have reached is far from utopian. *Asymmetrical information*, a possible explanatory factor for *some* of the issues now firmly entrenched within lockdown's economy of digital surveillance, was incubated through late neoliberalism's ever-expanding contradictions. Harvey highlights this discrepancy between neoliberal theory and practice: "all agents acting in the market are generally presumed to have access to the same information."⁵⁴ Shoshana Zuboff's 2019 work on *Surveillance Capitalism* is emblematic of the naïvety of this statement. It offers a starkly unequal, in fact asymmetrical, account of productive relations – which suggests that 'algorithmic' may be too neutral a term for describing contemporary governmentality. In the current asymmetrical configuration, "our personal experiences are scraped and packaged as the means to others' ends:" each digital interaction creates huge amounts of surplus data, which is sold on markets for future behaviour. According to Zuboff, the companies buying information about our future decisions are the market's consumers, while the analytics firms/tech platforms are the producers, which leaves us playing the role of 'raw material.'⁵⁵ Data points, gathered through our various online behaviours, are continuously being amassed to form predictive pictures of what individuals are going to do next. The typical example used is that of targeted advertising, where data *produced* by a platform (e.g., Facebook) is used to pinpoint a user's imminent need for a certain product (e.g., headphones). This information service can be bought (*consumed*) from Facebook by the headphone manufacturer and an ad delivered to the user at an opportune time. We would be equally naïve to think that the horizon of these processes is limited to material products. As shown in the 2019 documentary, *The Great Hack*, referendum outcomes can be targeted and modified in a similar way.⁵⁶ In this case, the producer was Cambridge Analytica/Facebook, the consumer was the Vote Leave 'Brexit' campaign, and the raw material was people's ability to exercise

⁵³ *Exposed*, 145-7.

⁵⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), 68.

⁵⁵ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019), 17-18.

⁵⁶ *The Great Hack*, directed by Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim (Netflix, 2019).
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117542>.

democratic power, or voting booth experience. While the point of value extraction for the Leave campaign may have been the precise moment their box was crossed, Facebook's end of the deal was played out over a number of months leading up to the referendum. 'Sponsored' political ads were filtered through the news feeds of key ('swing') voters, often geographically and demographically targeted in an attempt to infiltrate the mind of the user and to gradually modify their voting outcome.⁵⁷ This is one better documented example of countless transactions taking place on the digital surveillance market. As such, it has become increasingly difficult for the user to locate when, how, and between whom, transactions are taking place.

While Harcourt's *doppelgänger* logic emphasises the 'interactive' relationship between user and algorithm,⁵⁸ Zuboff widens the scope of this relationship through her concept of *instrumentarian power*. This new form of power shares similarities with biopower since it seeks to conduct the population on a large scale; however, it is far more coercive and insidious.⁵⁹ It refers to the process of continuously modifying consumer behaviour, such as in the Brexit campaign example used earlier. As Zuboff reminds us throughout her text, this form of power involves the use of our experiences for others' ends, and once capital is involved, these ends are invariably those of the highest bidder. This has resulted in what she calls a 'Coup from Above,' in which the digital industrial complex is free to produce vast swathes of knowledge about us, for its own ends, while we have little knowledge of its inner-workings and who benefits from the backroom deals. A contemporary UK example to illustrate this is the outsourcing of 'test and trace' contracts, often worth hundreds of millions, to corporations usually known to have links with senior government officials.⁶⁰ Zuboff questions whether such operations even fall under the definition of capitalism as we know it,⁶¹ opting to name the entire surveillance apparatus *Big Other*⁶² - further evidence of a departure from neoliberalism as the dominant form of governmentality in the UK.

However, in 2020, instrumentarian power is being wielded increasingly by governments, not just the private sector, to modify behaviour on a large scale. For example, 'SPI-B,' an advisory group to the government which specialises in behavioural psychology, recommended that "the perceived level of personal threat needs to be increased...using hard-hitting emotional messaging." It also encouraged the tailoring of messaging to produce exaggerated behavioural responses in specific groups,⁶³ and observed that "social

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Exposed*, 145-147.

⁵⁹ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), 351-353.

⁶⁰ Juliette Garside and Joseph Smith, "Tory-linked firm involved in testing failure given new £347m Covid contract," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/04/tory-linked-firm-involved-in-testing-failure-awarded-new-347m-covid-contract>

⁶¹ *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 495.

⁶² Ibid., 275.

⁶³ Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B), "Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures," service.gov.uk, March 22, 2020, 1-2.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887

approval can be a powerful source of reward,"⁶⁴ demonstrating government attempts to cultivate similar mentalities. With this in mind, I suggest defining *instrumentarian governmentality* as the use of digital surveillance instruments to produce affective responses, individually and within the population, for engineering predetermined political outcomes. The associated rationale is authoritarian in that instrumentarian governmentality seeks to erode autonomy (or manufacture consent) by using digital media to continuously filter emotionally charged material through to large, but targeted, swathes of the population over extended periods of time. With a view to the generation of politically relevant personal data, we should now consider the algorithmic 'interrogation' of desire as being concomitant with this instrumentarian ability to manipulate fear.

**MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING.
AVOID LARGE GATHERINGS. (DO NOT PROTEST)**

Lockdown Subjectivity

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault concludes that the plague-stricken town is the perfectly governed town. His seventeenth century example enforces a strict spatial segregation of individuals,⁶⁵ which is comparable to the infamous contemporary notion of 'social distancing.' Although this could be seen as an extension of neoliberal individualisation in an absolute sense, or a Deleuzian 'dividual,' the lifestyle of the locked-down subject differs significantly from the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*. Instead of the industrious, self-made entrepreneur, the subject is being encouraged to become a *consumption connoisseur*. Indeed, *connaître* could be a particularly useful word to highlight here: isolation from other people means that more time is generally spent interacting with the digital marketplace. As such, it has become increasingly important to *know* which of the practically infinite digital media you would like to consume next (an intensified version of *The Attention Economy*). The term 'self-knowing,' as employed by Foucault in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*,⁶⁶ could be misleading in the contemporary context though. This is because, in some senses, algorithms 'know' far more about you, or at least they possess far more data about you than you are able to consider at any given moment. The 'self' that is confronted and conversed with, then, is Harcourt's digital doppelgänger. This seeks to aid the locked-down subject on an interactive quest to continuously locate and relocate their desire. It is your digital footprint reflected back at you, but a footprint which changes in response to your online conduct in order to further stimulate desire and consumption.⁶⁷ Lockdown governmentality can therefore be seen as encouraging a cultivation of an intimate self-

[467/25-options-for-increasing-adherence-to-social-distancing-measures-22032020.pdf](#) (accessed May 1, 2020).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-200.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-2*, trans. Graham Burchill (2005), 3.

⁶⁷ *Exposed*, 145-147.

knowing of one's desires. Instrumentarian governmentality's specific stake in this process is that the more detailed, individualised and extensive the information generated from digital activity is, the more effectively it can be utilised to bring about future political goals.

A possible problem is how exactly to characterise the power exercised through lockdown governmentality. Is it more accurate to highlight “the seizure of power over the body in an individualising mode” (disciplinary power) or the seizure of the population in a “massifying” mode (biopower)?⁶⁸ The answer is both: instrumentarian governmentality can be posited as the digital *fusion* of disciplinary and biopower to produce a ‘totalising effect.’ While data companies’ and government’s dual attempts to manage and modify the population’s behaviour on a mass scale is no doubt important (and will be returned to later), this process begins on an individual level since, above all, lockdown subjectivity is epitomised by isolation.

Social distancing comprises the targeting of individual bodies (and minds) as dangerous⁶⁹ in two key ways. Firstly, through the idea that the individual body is a possible biohazard, or somehow a threat to public safety, and so needs to be suppressed. Secondly, reducing person-to-person contact encourages digital consumption and communication so that more behavioural surplus data can be collected. Additionally, this stifles the spread of unsanctioned information and the possibility of a non-digital collective agency. A combination can be seen here between Foucault's analysis of the ‘dangerous individual’ and disciplinary power's obsession with reducing *risk*.⁷⁰ His term “anatomy-politics”⁷¹ allows us to explore the problem further as it can be used to identify the various sensory sites for digital desire stimulation and interrogation. Lockdown's *stay at home* and *maintain social distancing* imperatives combine to consolidate the seizure of each bodily orifice by digital oligopolies. While our limbs may previously have been disciplined to *produce*, Apple and Samsung’s hardware (smartphones) offer the physical bridge to access this world of digital consumption. Our contemporary docility⁷² is instead enacted through *passive* scrolling, swiping and clicking. This process becomes more ambiguous when we are *active*, but if Zuboff is to be believed, then the difference between the two may already be difficult to distinguish. Google is an even more elusive figure, and its role is perhaps best characterised by Zuboff’s assessment of *Surveillance Capitalism* in general: “it operates through unprecedented asymmetries in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge.”⁷³ This is a remarkably Foucauldian sentence, although Zuboff does not cite Foucault.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 242.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, “About the Concept of the ‘Dangerous Individual’ in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 1:1 (1978), 1-18.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 55-61.

⁷¹ *Discipline and Punish*, 242.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 135-138.

⁷³ *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 18.

Moreover, the body can be seen not only as a site for the intimate cultivation of *connaître* - and the resultant scraping of surplus *savoir* produced through this doppelgänger process - but also as a site for the digital invasion of sensory information channels so that instrumentarian messages can be broadcast. This corresponds with Norbert Wiener's arguments concerning the positive relationship between ownership of the means of communication and societal control, an effect which he sees as being directly proportional to the size of the society⁷⁴ (the internet is perhaps the largest society to date). Combined with the instruction to *avoid large gatherings* and keep a distance from people, this serves to minimise the risk of any possible insurgent activity.

My depiction is by no means an exhaustive account of contemporary economic relations but is intended as a warning about the subjective implications of lockdown governmentality. Indeed, a teleology based on lockdown and social distancing would likely share similarities with the state of humanity depicted aboard the 'Axiom' in Pixar's *WALL-E*.⁷⁵ In this scenario, humans have evolved to lose significant skeletal function due to lack of physical exercise.⁷⁶ Awash with various forms of electronic communication and constant adverts, they are physically attended to by an entourage of artificially intelligent robots. Interestingly, they are spatially partitioned and automatically transported along paths of least resistance, similar to the system of arrows that we see in UK supermarkets today. They are certainly *consumption connoisseurs*.

Under neoliberal theories of 'human capital,' many forms of consumption had become viewed primarily as acts of 'self-production,' the most notable example being education. However, in lockdown, the behavioural surplus knowledge produced through digital consumption is arguably of greater importance than any supposed benefit to us. Overall, the hegemony of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* becomes doubtful. Schultz argues that "much of what we call consumption constitutes investment in human capital" (i.e., investment in oneself), concluding that people are understandably inclined to spend a lot of time and money on this. He complained, in 1961, that little of this activity - "the use of leisure time to improve skills and knowledge" - is recorded but likely makes up a large

⁷⁴ Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (2019), 221-224.

⁷⁵ *WALL-E*, directed by Andrew Stanton (2008; Emeryville, California: Pixar Animation Studios), DVD.

⁷⁶ Of course, it could be contended that lockdown has, on the contrary, produced an explosion of physical exercise and self-care, with upticks in at-home-yoga, Zoom fitness classes, and jogging. However, we should be cautious in drawing the conclusion that physical exercise has increased across the whole population. With the eradication of team sports and the general encouragement of indoor living, it is very difficult to gain an overall picture of 'health' within the population. This picture might be obscured even further by the fact that the above phenomena represent an increase in physical activities which are digitally recorded; either through their very online nature or through the various digital health devices and applications such as 'Fitbits.' Rather than reading the motivations for this activity through a lens of American neoliberalism - self-improvement, image cultivation and the refinement of one's mental and physical attributes to become more effective 'human capital' - the lockdown lens would read that the subject is merely trying to maintain a baseline of physical health to mitigate mental health risks and issues.

proportion of unexplained economic development.⁷⁷ Nowadays, much of this activity is recorded.

Instead of knowledge for self-production, the object of focus in lockdown should be the 'behavioural surplus' data/knowledge/*savoir* produced about you, for others, by digital consumption. Now that the neoliberal veil of self-improvement has been lifted, there seems to be very little benefit (other than analgesia) to you from consuming digital media. I am not talking about the bare-bones communicative functions provided by instant messaging services, e.g., for staying in touch with loved ones (although these also generate similar data). I am talking partly about films and documentaries but also, most importantly, endless scrolling through videos, memes etc. What is the point of them all, if we ourselves have no life to compare them with? Surprisingly, post-nineteenth century criminal psychology may shed some light on this question. Foucault argues that since then, penal systems have developed to concern themselves, above all, with leveling the following question at the defendant: 'who are you?'⁷⁸ The industrial complex of digital surveillance is interested in producing multi-layered, context and time sensitive answers to this question – for every digitally connected person. De Beistegui's study, *The Government of Desire*, makes a crucial point that the neoliberal subject is the producer of their own satisfaction or utility.⁷⁹ A lockdown scenario actually exacerbates this since the ostensible lack of economic activity and abundant 'leisure time' force an agony-of-choice upon the subject about how best to optimise, or 'make *use of*,' their lockdown experience. After a day or so of painting, the scope of choice becomes overwhelmingly digital. As explored though, when it comes to digital media, we should no longer necessarily see 'self-production,' with a view to entrepreneurship, as the most important implication of consumption. The neoliberal rationality, especially prevalent in American neoliberalism, that "utility maximisation is a comprehensive way of life"⁸⁰ carries an important legacy in revealing how we have been trained to pursue optimised consumption. Within our digitally saturated context, the neoliberal notion of 'optimisation' has begun to take on a noticeably 'algorithmic' identity. Here we can glimpse elements of the historical transition from neoliberal to algorithmic governmentality. Certainly, they are intimately connected: neoliberalism is a fundamentally economic rationale which carries forward into our attempts to optimally gratify ourselves as *consumption connoisseurs*. However, with a view to one's longer term self-production and formation as *homo oeconomicus*, the current algorithmic rationale does not seem primarily concerned with the user's prosperity. Rather, in lockdown, the doppelgänger consumption process acts to generate increasingly incisive information, concerning the question, as Cheney-Lippold puts it, of: 'Who do they think you are?' His emphasis on security-driven attempts to collect 'the entire haystack' of data, just

⁷⁷ Theodore W. Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review* 51:1 (1961), 1-17.

⁷⁸ Foucault, "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in 19th-Century Legal Psychiatry," 1-18.

⁷⁹ De Beistegui, *The Government of Desire*, 78.

⁸⁰ May and McWhorter, "Who's Being Disciplined Now?," 251.

in case 'a needle' may need finding, corroborates Foucault's notion that power targets individuals as potentially dangerous and produces a situation of panoptic surveillance.⁸¹

Foucault describes (neo)liberal governmentality in the simplest possible terms as "the art of least possible government."⁸² However, this is noticeably out of step with the UK government's future plan to become more involved, as encapsulated by section 5.13 of their rebuild strategy. They plan to implement "more subtle restrictions" on an ongoing basis while coupling this with more "robust enforcement measures."⁸³ Perhaps, instead, a renewed 'suspicion of the risk of governing too much' (Foucault's definition of liberalism)⁸⁴ is precisely what the UK needs. At the same time, 'gentler' disciplinary measures still remain. This begins to invoke the Orwellian notion of 'doublethink,' a situation in which the simultaneous existence of two opposing realities becomes normalised.⁸⁵ Are we living in a police state? Or is it business as usual? The overall fixation on reducing *risk*, typical of disciplinary societies,⁸⁶ still persists. Indeed, the instructions to socially distance and to avoid large gatherings are aimed precisely at reducing risk: of both infection and protest. These encapsulate the two primary ways in which individuals are being constituted as 'dangerous.' The strategy is especially effective when considering that the government has attached moral and social judgement to *counter-conduct*: "Please. For the safety of your loved ones, do not attend large gatherings, including demonstrations."⁸⁷ While the invocations of this instruction are alarming, they are at least reassuringly neoliberal. The moral governance of self-conduct is outsourced to the individual, rather than being outright imposed. This is reminiscent of the continual re-examination and reconstitution of oneself in relation to a central text (narrative) explored in *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*.⁸⁸ Winston undergoes a more extreme version of this process in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which he constantly evaluates his memories relative to what he is told by the party, until his own memory is reconfigured altogether.⁸⁹

CONTROL THE VIRUS. SAVE LIVES.

Foucault argues that in disciplinary societies, the disorder of the plague is met by order. The uncertainty of the plague is met by a proliferation of 'truths' in order to make *sense* of

⁸¹ John Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (2017), 151, 43-44.

⁸² *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 28.

⁸³ "Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy," gov.uk, May 11, 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy#fourteen-supporting-programmes> (accessed June 21, 2020).

⁸⁴ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319.

⁸⁵ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2008), 16.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 55-61.

⁸⁷ "UK government urges people not to protest due to COVID-19," YouTube video, 0:39-1:00, posted by Sky News, June 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juelHb0P_Vk.

⁸⁸ Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 166-167.

⁸⁹ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 44.

and keep *control* of events. Crucially, the regulation of “even the smallest details of everyday life” allows for the production of a series of truths about individuals: their true name, place, body, disease etc.⁹⁰ The digital age allows for the same process to be extended to include more information, with constant updates about the population as a whole being broadcast.

‘Information flooding’

During lockdown, we have become accustomed to over-abundant information. Daily updates on numbers of tests, cases and above all deaths have become part of our digital diet. ‘Event 201,’ a global pandemic planning exercise, attended by various representatives from governments, corporations and international organisations was, strangely enough, conducted on 18 October 2019. It recommended “the ability to flood media with fast, accurate, and consistent information” to combat the spread of ‘false information.’⁹¹ Lo and behold, 3 months later, daily updates delivered automatically to all smartphones became the new routine of 2020. This contemporary infatuation with data serves a dual purpose. In addition to registering a database of individuals, algorithmic governmentality seeks verification through the persistent illusion that the government is constantly administering the country in the most efficient way possible. As Weiskopf highlights, ‘post-facticity’ has been trumped by *hyper-facticity*. The incessant generation of apparent objectivity through data purports to transcend the realm of human error, thereby giving a reassuring sense that ‘things’ are doing the governing rather than people, and thereby also diminishing human accountability for decision-making.⁹² This is exemplified by the UK government’s daily Downing Street briefings, which seek management of ‘The Curve’ (of infections and deaths) down to the finest detail. In this way, a ‘perfect’ algorithmic balance between the incursion of private freedoms and overall public safety can be continuously re-defined. The approach retains a certain managerial quality familiar to neoliberalism, but it entails such detailed and specific micro-management of everyday behaviour that it smacks of a data-driven rationale. For example, you were newly able to attend places of worship for individual prayer from 13 June 2020, and face coverings were made compulsory on public transport from 15 June (although they were not during ‘the peak’) - ensuring an environment of continual algorithmic flux. These, and other countless detailed regulations are conditional upon the rate of infection (*R*) at a given time⁹³ - further evidence of governmentality based on data.

⁹⁰ *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

⁹¹ The John Hopkins Center for Health Security, “Public-private Cooperation for Pandemic Preparedness and Response - A Call to Action,” centerforhealthsecurity.org, 2019. <https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/event201/event201-resources/200117-PublicPrivatePandemicCalltoAction.pdf> (accessed June 19, 2020).

⁹² Weiskopf, “Algorithmic Decision-Making, Spectrogenic Profiling and Hyper-Facticity in the Age of Post-Truth,” 1-37.

⁹³ UK Health Security Agency, “Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19,” gov.uk, April 1, 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social->

While neoliberalism fostered a degree of economic precarity, the locked-down subject is additionally faced with constant legal precarity: a significant barrier to self-entrepreneurial subjectivity and non-digital wealth creation. Should restrictions continue to fluctuate, one could easily find oneself being unwittingly arrested from one day to the next, even while behaving in the same way, with the law having changed overnight. Similar to the ideal neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, the mould of the perfect lockdown citizen is another 'real fiction' - no citizen could possibly comply absolutely with such a complex and ever-changing set of demands. And increasingly, as Harcourt argues, the data certainly exists to catch anyone out at a moment's notice.⁹⁴ All of this is reminiscent of Foucault's claims regarding the unlimited internal objectives of the police state - to further its power over the population endlessly.⁹⁵ An "emphatic, accentuated, fine and subtle governmentality of regimentation with no predetermined limits."⁹⁶ Foucault notes that if it weren't for external competition, states would be much more inclined to invade and control the daily lives of their citizens.⁹⁷ By this logic, we can see the recently increased regimentation of the population by the police state as an additional indicator of reduced international competition, the latter having been a beacon of the global neoliberal order. Foucault theorises that, in a (neo-)liberal setting, due to external competition between states, it is within the interest of individual nations to cultivate productive subjects internally. This is perhaps the most fundamental point of intersection between neoliberalism and biopolitics. Laws which encourage health and well-being within the population go hand in hand with laws which encourage economic prosperity. Foucault defines (liberal) policing as the art of managing life and well-being within the population, with its objective being a population that is as large, sufficiently provided for, healthy and active as possible. His use of the term 'circulation' offers a lucid example of his vision for the crossover between biology and economy. Promoting the free flow of goods, labour (through transport networks) and information becomes analogous with maintaining a human body which is in good working order.⁹⁸ Now it seems that we have drifted some distance from these aims. Instead, our current economic body is constipated by frequent blood clots, hamstrung by restrictions which do not appear to be holistically promoting 'health,' while our antibodies (or police), which are usually tasked with protection, are frequently tasked with attacking their own cells (citizens). What seems to be going on, collectively, is the suppression of the ecological economic body and its replacement with an artificial, digital economic body.

[distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing](#) (accessed April 15, 2020).

⁹⁴ *Exposed*, 141-145.

⁹⁵ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 7-9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁹⁸ *Security, Territory, Population*, 323-326.

The Digital Health Passport

With a view to these altered mentalities, ‘population control’ becomes the central term in need of emphasis. As Lawrence Dunegan highlights, this notion should not only be conceived of as control over population numbers but also more generally as denoting increased control over the daily lives and endeavours of the population.⁹⁹ It is important to stress, though, as Lorenzini does, that contemporary forms of biopower should not just be viewed as inherently good or bad but always as dangerous.¹⁰⁰ This reminds us of ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics,’ an interview with Foucault in which he explains: “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, collaboration between the pharmaceutical and digital industrial complexes, a global phenomenon unique to this time, affords the possibility of vastly extending the domain of biopower. The digital health passport ‘COVI-PASS’ promises “a safe return to work and life” through the continuous assessment of virus test results, general health, and immune response of the user.¹⁰² In theory, this could provide a roadmap for improvements in disease prevention, population health and other security measures. What subsequently manifests is Foucault’s notion of *permanent registration* in a completely literal sense: “each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings.”¹⁰³ We return to the economy of perfect information: this could offer precise data on who needs what treatment when, and which facilities are available to carry this out.

In terms of security, neoliberal governmentality employed market principles to produce justice. The proliferation of information, emphasised by Harcourt’s ‘expository society’ (even understated if biometric data is to be added to the tally), renders fraud practically *impossible*. What Harcourt means by ‘exposition’ is that many of our actions, public and private, through the digital footprint they produce, are permanently put on record and thereby possess the possibility of being *exposed* at a moment’s notice. In this sense, he argues that our digital self is far more “provable” than our analog self.¹⁰⁴ He reimagines the famous Martin Guerre example to illustrate this. This case of identity theft warranted a complex judicial procedure by early 1560s rural French standards. However, as Harcourt explains, the whole process would instantly be made redundant by any number of today’s permanent registration mechanisms, be that location tracking, CCTV, fingerprints, face recognition, ad infinitum...¹⁰⁵ Whether or not this “compulsory extraction of truth” to create “networks of obedience”¹⁰⁶ is desirable is another debate altogether, but the implications for governmentality are significant.

⁹⁹ Lawrence Dunegan, “The New Order of Barbarians,” transcript of speech (1988), 2.

¹⁰⁰ Daniele Lorenzini, “Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus,” *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), 40-45.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Ethics*, 266.

¹⁰² VST Enterprises, “Covi-pass,” covi-pass.com (accessed 29 May 2020).

¹⁰³ *Discipline and Punish*, 195-200, 197.

¹⁰⁴ *Exposed*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 141-145.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 184.

As such, it is important to examine the health passport from another angle: COVI-PASS also represents the integration of increasingly refined data - now biometric - into the pre-established surveillance network. This is evidenced by the delivery of the pass through supporting technology 'VCODE,' which boasts its ability to "revolutionise electronic transactions."¹⁰⁷ Some of its functions, as listed on the government's digital marketplace, include: "Full Scan Analytics - track who, what, when and where;" "Analyse user behaviour patterns, traffic and workflows;" "Real Time Tracking" and "Bespoke end user content delivery," to name a few.¹⁰⁸ Should all of this data for continuous assessment be brought together, as potentially facilitated by COVI-PASS, we could reach an (instrumentarian) governmentality which embodies absolutely, and likely exceeds, Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary mechanism:

It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him.¹⁰⁹

Deleuze notes, in his explanation of emergent *control societies*, that the enclosures (schools, hospitals, prisons) which characterise Foucault's *disciplinary societies* act as behavioural *moulds* for subjects. Whereas control operates through *modulation* – incentives and punitive measures are made to fluctuate based on behaviour (Deleuze uses the example of corporate bonuses).¹¹⁰ This echoes recent governmental tendencies to alternate between dangling 'the carrot' of ending lockdown - a return to 'normality' - and brandishing 'the stick' of further, invasive, rigorously enforced, dehumanising restrictions. Indeed, Deleuze's analysis of the *limitless postponement* associated with control societies is excruciatingly accurate when it comes to lockdown.

Deleuze goes on to argue that control's numerical modulation needn't be binary;¹¹¹ however, this is not the case with instrumentarian governmentality. Instead, it uses digital (in the strictest sense of the term, think: 1/0, on/off, true/false) surveillance instruments to ensure continuous modulation between permitted and forbidden, 'safe' and 'unsafe' bodies, 'opening up' and 'locking down' – subliminally reinforced by the patronising 'big green tick' or 'big red cross' symbols scattered throughout public spaces and visual domains. With a precedent that freedoms can be bestowed or revoked, in relation to the continual need to demonstrate one's 'COVID-19 status,' a considerable danger of the passport scheme emerges. The idea of *status* here, in practice, extends itself to denote 'citizen' or 'sub-citizen,' leading to a two-tiered society of instrumentarian binarisation. May and McWhorter predict, following a fragmentation of neoliberalism, "a resurgence of some

¹⁰⁷ <https://vstenterprises.com/> (accessed May 29, 2020).

¹⁰⁸ "VPlatform & VCode by VST Enterprises Limited," gov.uk, <https://www.digitalmarketplace.service.gov.uk/g-cloud/services/588890073077344> (accessed May 29, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ *Discipline and Punish*, 197.

¹¹⁰ Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," (1992), 3-7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

modified forms of sovereign power,"¹¹² which they characterise as "the old binary power of rule:" an absolute, rigidly enforced, distinction between realms of permitted and forbidden activity.¹¹³ Guattari's imaginary city explains the possible long term effect of a digital health passport: "one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position - licit or illicit - and effects a universal modulation."¹¹⁴

In its current formulation, the digital health passport represents a formidable control mechanism, threatening the very foundations of autonomy and privacy (certainly very 'dangerous'). In order for any such system to be worthwhile, it should not represent a centralised database, with its modulation linked to socially desirable behaviour (i.e., a social credit system); the data sovereignty of the user should be protected, and those who opt out of the scheme should not be discriminated against in any way. The priority should be to improve the health of the user, *not* ulterior political and economic motives, which are emblematic of an instrumentarian mentality. Understandably, many countries (including the UK) have since wisely moved away from the digital health passport as a legitimate strategy of liberal governance.

Instrumentarian governmentality is so expansive that it considers its domains of jurisdiction to be the quantity air molecules between strangers, the bloodstream of the global population, and numbers of people permitted to socialise at a given time, to name just a few examples. This problematic form of government encapsulates the fusion of large scale population management with individualised disciplinary regimentation. While Foucault's insights regarding power/knowledge mechanisms remain timeless in their relevance, the limits of their application must expand to meet new challenges posed by dangerous digital landscapes - comprising such sticky terrain as QR codes and echo chambers. In view of lockdown's recent impact on such realms, it would seem that we are now in need of a renewed 'suspicion of the risk of governing too much.'¹¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Lockdown could therefore represent significant changes to society at large, notably through the digital fusion of disciplinary power and biopower. This 'omniscience' afforded to governments and corporations by data, now increasingly biometric, creates a web of surveillance and hidden transactions. Indeed, the rationale for governing now hinges significantly on available data, and the lockdown subject faces economic and legal precarity should they fail to keep pace with algorithmic decision-making. Indeed, 'algorithmic governmentality' is presented as a key feature of lockdown governmentality, but

¹¹² "Who's Being Disciplined Now?," 257.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹⁴ "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.

¹¹⁵ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 319.

this is by no means a complete account of what we are living through. The former is perhaps too benign a term since it neglects current realities of exposition, surveillance and coercion. As such, I introduced the concept of ‘instrumentarian governmentality’ to address the use of digital surveillance instruments by corporations and governments to manipulate the fears and desires of the population. This concept additionally denotes the binary modulation of control mechanisms in response to socially desirable behaviour. And although the extent of the current connections between nation-states, multinational data platforms and global organisations needs further investigation, I hope to have shown in this paper that lockdown governmentality operates through three main guises: neoliberal, algorithmic and instrumentarian. The propensity to modulate between these three is rather appropriate, given lockdown's provisional and ever-changing nature. As such, in the past two years, neoliberalism was no longer the only, nor the dominant form of governmentality in the UK. But with lockdowns lifting worldwide, and new forms of liberalism being propagated as a result, it remains to be seen whether neoliberalism will make a significant reappearance.

In the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault famously asks: “How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant?” With a view to governmentality, we should maintain that “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” is inextricably linked to “the historical fascism [...] of Hitler and Mussolini - which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively.” Hence, it is our individual responsibility to “ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior,”¹¹⁶ by instead cultivating a governmentality which does not fall victim to the instrumentarian impulses currently coded into our desiring machines, nor does it rely, for differentiation and decision-making, on the algorithmic application of face-value, superficial *savoir*. A governmentality which finally emerges from its oedipal echo chamber, ready to reflect on, and exchange, competing ideas, to be an entrepreneur of liberated behaviours, organisational forms and futures, and to produce a rationale, rule of law, and economic order that promotes equality in exchange, symmetry of information, and mutual social understanding.

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¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “Preface,” in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (1983), xiii.

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