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GOVERNMENTALITY AT WORK
IN SHAPING A CRITICAL
GEOGRAPHICAL POLITICS

Nick Lewis

Governmentality. The very word makes some scholars tremble with anticipation and leaves
others cold at the thought of inscrutable text and a high level of abstraction.
(Rutherford 2007: 291)

The concept of governmentality focuses attention on the practices of governing, or, as Nikolas
Rose (1999) puts it, the ‘how’ of government. In short, a governmentality configures forms of
governmental knowledge, expertise, and practice into a particular ‘politics’ or ‘regime’ of truth
(Lemke 2002; Rose 1999). The concept has become prominent in the critique of neoliberalism,
particularly in terms of the coupling ‘neoliberal governmentality’. In my own discipline, while
geographers were relatively slow to pick up on the concept (Prince and Duffy 2009), it became
an important analytical frame from the early 2000s and began to stimulate the passage of insights
and political sensitivities across sub-disciplinary, geographical and epistemological boundaries
within the discipline (see, for example, MacKinnon 2000, Uitermark 2005, Painter 2006,
2010). The notion of governmentality was used more or less explicitly to bridge conceptual
separations between strategy or ideology and the practice of governing, the political and the
cultural, the material and the discursive, the ideological and the technological, and the politics
of the subject and the politics of the state, or at least to hold them in creative tension (Ettlinger
2011; Larner and Walters 2004). How effective the approach has proven in connecting these
different knowledge terrains is uncertain, but I argue in this chapter that it has, at least in one
academic setting, served to foster a distinctive critical geography, what Larner and Le Heron
(2002) have termed ‘post-structuralist political economy’ (PSPE).

The chapter traces the ways in which governmentality has been deployed in a particular field,
economic geography. I examine how it has led a particular group of economic geographers to
build a project of knowledge production from a long-term critical engagement with the changing
nature, form and work of neoliberal governmentality in the antipodes. In this way the chapter weaves
together an abbreviated genealogy of governmentality analysis in economic geography with a
reflection on my own situated engagement with it as a New Zealand geographer. This engagement
has involved seeking to account for the work of neoliberal governmentality in shaping a particular
neoliberal social formation and to shape a political response as an academic economic geographer.
The chapter, therefore, provides a situated reading of the
conceptual work of governmentality in shaping PSPE as a positioned, constructively critical accounting of neoliberalism. Two points are crucial here. First, in keeping with the emphasis on practice and the particular in governmentality thinking itself, the chapter is very much an explicitly situated reading of governmentality, one that is set, as is all knowledge production, in time, place, and discipline. Second, it is offered as a humble and partial response to Ferguson’s (2011) call for a very different and genuinely ‘left’ art of government, which he suggests demands of us a commitment to different political practices. Inspiration for such a commitment, he argues, might be better found in an experimental materialist application of Foucault than in continued distantiated denunciation of neoliberalism.

Governmentality

Governmentality refers to the interplay of the mentalities and practices of rule that guide the production of governable subjects and spaces. In Huxley’s terms (2008: 142–3) terms, it can be seen as a ‘composite’ of government, ‘practices, programmes and projects that aspire to bring about certain aims for the government of individuals’, and mentality, ‘the discursive ‘truths’ that serve as rationales for the aims of government of others and the self’. The concept directs attention to the links between technologies of power (governing, or the exercise of power) and the political rationalities (modes of thought) that underpin them and take elaborated forms around them. For Foucault, the object of contemporary government is the population, which is ruled through a biopolitics embedded in ‘the administration of life itself’ (McKee 2009). Government is interpreted as the ‘conduct of conduct’, a set of calculated strategies and related interventions that encourage individuals to act upon themselves (Foucault 2003). Government brings the self into a productive relationship with its own subjectivity through technologies of self-control. Power is, in this sense, understood as productive and to work through the subject via the conduct of conduct. Lemke (2002) suggests that Foucault developed the concept of governmentality to examine how all this works; that is, how technologies and programmes of political rule and economic exploitation mobilize the capacity of the self-governing subject to govern itself, and how technologies of the self are aligned to technologies of domination. Governmentality offers an analytical framework for a critique of the assemblage of rationalities and micro-practices of governance and techniques of control that we have come to term ‘neoliberalism’.

For state theorists, governmentality allows us to grasp the implications of how ‘neoliberalism re-codes the locus of the state in the discourse of politics’ (Rose and Miller 1992: 199). It helps us to extend the more familiar observations that: markets have displaced planning as ‘regulators of economic activity’; market principles have displaced government responsibilities for welfare; and economic competition and entrepreneurship have displaced self-discipline, passivity and dependence in relation to regulation as a basis for self-optimization. Rather than rendering neoliberalism intelligible by ‘counterposing a non-intervenionist state to an interventionist state’, governmentality analysis reads it as ‘a reorganisation of political rationalities that brings them into a kind of alignment with contemporary technologies of government’ (ibid.). Neoliberalism renders contemporary economies and nation-states governable by mobilizing markets to achieve a ‘congruence’ between ‘a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational actor’ (Lemke 2001: 203). As Lemke (ibid.) argues:

the theoretical strength of the concept of governmentality consists of the fact that it construes neo-liberalism not just as ideological rhetoric, as a political-economic reality or as a practical anti-humanism, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists.
A focus on governmentality, then, directs attention to technologies of control as much as the political programmes that materialized them. It is a framework of thought for examining the interplay between political agency and neoliberal ideology (and its agents), in a context set by Foucault’s conception of power, ‘government’, and ‘biopolitics’. In these terms, Walters (2006) suggests that governmentality accounts offer both more and less than alternative theoretical positions – more sensitivity to micro-politics and discursive political formulations than the position taken by political economy, yet a recognition that there is always more than the discursive at work. Both Walters (ibid.) and Lemke (2002) refer, for example, to the way that such a recognition should encourage a genealogy of the state rather than a theory of the state. For Li (2007: 277), this focus on governmentality highlights the political potential that lies in critique of detail and the recognition that ‘politics is not external to government, it is constitutive of it’. For geographers interested in the spatiality of power (see, for example, Allen 2003), the creative agonism at the heart of governmentality between the governance of a population and the governance of the self (Ettlinger 2011: 540) challenges the analytical value and ontological status of scalar hierarchies of power in a productive way.

Together these critical insights borne of governmentality thinking highlight three trajectories of scholarship that have been pivotal to the development and practice of PSPE, which I outline below. The first is that any actualized neoliberalism and any critique of it as a political project cannot help but be situated, not only in place-specific political economy but also within the context of particular institutions of knowledge production. Second, as rationalities grounded in practice and thereby in place, governmentalities presuppose connection to political projects. They may stimulate, provoke, become attached to or emerge from grounded political projects scaled at levels from the subject to the household, community, neighbourhood, city, nation-state or even the global (Larner et al. 2007). An exploration of neoliberalism’s governmentalities should thus point to particular placed neoliberal assemblages of political programmes, ideologies, rationalities, and technologies. And, third, as Li emphasizes, the fissures created by the inevitable contradictions within governmentalities, the inability to map technologies of the self seamlessly onto those of population control or domination, the routine failures of the self to be efficiently self-governing, and the failures in coordination across all these different technologies and their alignments with political programmes, all promise to open up opportunities for politics. If a governmentality critique of neoliberalism therefore points to grounded political geographies and multiple spaces for politics, then it also issues an intellectual or moral imperative to treat explorations of different neoliberalisms and examinations of experiences of them as resources for political possibility. This is what those working with PSPE are increasingly labelling ‘enactive critique’ (Lewis et al. 2016). What’s required, however, to see in governmentality what Ferguson terms a potentially new political ‘art’ of the Left are projects of knowledge production that transcend an interest in the mentalities of rule or a disengaged denouncement of governmental projects as neoliberal (Ferguson 2011). This will necessitate new, possibly ethnographic ways of doing scholarship and critique that address ‘how subjects subjectify’ (McKee 2009; Prince and Dufty 2009; Barnett et al. 2008).

**Governmentality in economic geography**

Lemke (2002) suggests that the critique of neoliberalism across the critical social sciences is characterized by an assault on: its ‘manipulative promotion of a “wrong knowledge” of society and economy’; its materialization in new political regimes that enable and foster a global, corporate capitalism; and its destructive impacts on particular individuals and social groups. Political economy is counterposed as ‘a right or emancipatory knowledge’ the triumph of which will
somehow overthrow the neoliberal political order. While political economy in geography has typically been more grounded and nuanced, it has nonetheless largely eschewed the finer-grained critique of neoliberal government and statecraft offered by governmentality analyses and, in turn, the practice of an engaged politics that might ensue (see Keil 2009). Prince and Dufty (2009) point to a governmentality-influenced economic geography exploring the mobilities of neoliberal ideas, policy and actors. Arguably, however, as is the case with other governmentality critiques of the neoliberal state, even this literature has tended to draw evidence from the ‘discursive’ realm rather than material practice, thereby concentrating on the rationales of governing as manifest in key (government) documents, rather than more specific and concrete ‘arts of governing’ (McKee 2009: 473). McKee suggests that governmentality analysis ought also to consider the ‘extent to which these political ambitions have been realized in practice’ and confront why it is that the imagined governable subject does not appear in practice (ibid.: 475).

This must lead us to question whether, with exceptions (see Murdoch and Ward 1997), economic geographers have yet to realize the full political potential of governmentality approaches to examine material practices and subject formation in economies (be they in the realm of regulation, production, consumption, finance or otherwise). This gap was certainly true for my own work with neoliberal governmentality in models of parental choice in schooling, where I imagined but did not explore the choosing and responsibilized parental subjectivities of quasi-markets in state schooling (Lewis 2004a). The example illustrates how this early work in geography, to quote McKee again, risked not only promoting an ‘overly abstract view of governing in which politics is reduced to rationality’, but also of representing neoliberalism ‘as omnipresent and totalizing’ and thereby negating agency and the possibility of politics. Such accounts use governmentality to perform a more incisive deconstruction of its ideological centre and market-centric rationalities of rule that Springer (2010: 1033) suggests is a necessary first step to mount a constructive opposition to neoliberalism. While yet to perform such a politics, they have occasionally recognized its possibility.

The recent interventions of Nancy Ettlinger (2011, 2014), however, suggest that more is to come as economic geographers seek to deal with the empirical messiness of economy (Ettlinger and Hartmann 2015). So too do the turns to practice (see Jones and Murphy 2010) and market-making (Berndt and Boeckler 2011) in economic geography, and the promise of a complementary turn to ethnography. Combined with the new interest in economy-making, such an approach may lead economic geographers to a long-overdue engagement with economic subjectivity and real economic subjects going about their experimentation in economy-making in mundane daily settings. Other examples of untapped possibility here include the grounded community economies project to ‘take back’ the economy led by Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) and the vital materialities emphases of the biological economies project (Lewis et al. 2013; Lewis et al. 2016).

The work of Wendy Larner has been particularly influential on this trajectory. In the late 1990s, influenced by the Carleton School of Foucauldian scholars and the New Zealand experience of neoliberalism, Larner developed two arguments about neoliberalism that were later refined in her highly influential 2003 paper. She argued that, rather than a singular reprogramming of social life rolled out across space and through time, neoliberalism ought to be understood as a multiple, emergent and always situated and co-constitutive assemblage of ideology, political programmes and governmentality (Larner 1998). Thus understood, neoliberalism has had multiple origin points as political subjects have encountered, explored and reworked its conditions of possibility (Larner 2000). In bringing ‘governmentality’ to political-economic geography in this way, Larner privileged it as an analytical frame for considering the interplay of strategic projects and routine micro-practices of the state, and for considering the work of neoliberalism in reworking both subject and state simultaneously. Both moves offered economic
Governmentality at work in geographical politics

geographers a lens for seeing the co-constitutiveness of what Peck and Tickell (2002) were later to term the ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ moments of neoliberalism. Intriguingly, in another governmentality inspired account, Ettinger and Hartmann (2015: 37) have recently suggested that these apparently contradictory trajectories of disentanglement and re-engagement by which the state was relocated in politics under neoliberalism are better understood ‘in relational terms relative to principles not time periods’ and as ‘mutually entangled’ in the context of neoliberal practices rather than sequential.

Treating neoliberalism as governmentality rather than an impenetrable coupling of ideology and political programme opens up a realm of politics unreachable through orthodox political economy. Where political economists have struggled to develop a politics that might assist communities, publics, politicians or state officials to deliver something different, governmentality analysts have highlighted the micro-politics, practices and technologies of control at play. Even if guilty, as charged by McKee (2009), of over-concentrating on policy documents and political discourses, or, as charged by Barnett et al. (2008), of failing to identify and examine neoliberal subjects empirically, the focus on the practical identifies sites of struggle and/or reform. Even if the political potentiality of this focus is as yet far from fully realized, holding political economy and questions of subject and community formation in simultaneous focus raises the possibility of performing politics by engaging with neoliberal subjects theoretically and in the moments and places of their agency. By holding ideology and practice in creative tension, governmentality accounts complement political economy interests in sameness, trajectories, and structurings with an interest in the mutabilities, cracks and weak points in neoliberalism (see Carolan 2016). There are two important observations to be drawn from this reflection. First, when it comes to neoliberalism, a turn towards a governmentality reading of the significance of practice, the conception of power as constructive, and the discursive construction of social realities suggests that there is still a politics to be played within and through the state. And second, as Larner (2003) and many others writing about neoliberalism beyond the North Atlantic axis insist, there are multiple origins, trajectories, and actualized expressions of neoliberalism.

For those who embrace either or both of these reflections, the co-constitutive situatedness of knowledge, action and experience is crucial. It means that neoliberalism cannot be reduced to a universalist account globalizing ideology or political programme spreading out from its centres tempered by a recognition of the consequences of frictions generated by encounters with a material, social and economic topography (Lewis 2012). Rather, different actualized neoliberalisms reflect the incompleteness and internal contradictions of neoliberalism itself as well as local political projects and institutions. Antipodean geographers have also emphasized the significance of how we have come to know neoliberalism on what it is that we now observe and know as neoliberalism (Wray et al. 2013). Like Larner, and often alongside her, I have built my knowledge of neoliberalism from New Zealand (Lewis 2004b, Larner et al. 2007, 2009), which experienced new public management reforms that went further and faster than most other places in driving neoliberalism into social formation through the state. It was, as Kelsey (1995) suggests, a remarkable ‘experiment’. There is much in the socio-spatial context responsible for the nature and speed of this experiment and its successful completion, including smallness and institutional thinness (Lewis 2012). One of the consequences of New Zealand’s smallness is a cross-disciplinary academic community that fed, first, neoliberalism and, then, governmentality into the mincing wheel that is geographical thought earlier than elsewhere. As a knowable assemblage of agency, practice, and discourse and an object for critique by geographers, neoliberalism was brought into being differently and earlier in New Zealand as a result of cross-disciplinary exposure to the work of Power (1994), Rose (1999), Clarke and Newman (1997) and others. New Zealand geography’s
engagement with neoliberalism was also different (see Lewis 2004b). A tradition of academic engagement with state actors in debates about spatial efficiency and equity in fields from regional development to urban transport, environmental management, health, education and so on (see Lewis et al. 2013), left geographers struggling to find a new audience and politics of engagement at precisely the time when they were developing a critique of the neoliberal political project. A path of disengaged and distanced critique of the ‘neoliberalism of it all’ from the sanctuary of elite institutions was not available to New Zealand geographers as a way out, even if it were desired. The challenge was to find new tools for thinking and engaging.

**From governmentality towards a post-structuralist political economy in New Zealand**

Governmentality analysis provided such a platform for Larner and Le Heron. In the early 2000s, they secured a blue skies grant that allowed them to develop the ideas of PSPE first signalled in Larner’s doctoral dissertation. This project was built on a critique of neoliberalism in which governmentality was not only the object of analysis and epistemology, but also a key instrument in a political project of knowledge-making. Together, and in what was a unique intervention in global scholarship, Larner and Le Heron ran four cross-disciplinary workshops in Auckland, Canberra, Seattle and Bristol under the title Beyond Globalisation: Subjectification and Governmentality. I participated in the Auckland and Bristol workshops.

The workshops were purposefully dialogical. Each assembled up to 25 established, new generation, and graduate student scholars for one to two days (Le Heron 2007); and each focused debate on subjectification and/or spatiality in relation to a reinterpretation of globalization as governmentality. While populated largely by geographers, scholars were assembled from across disciplines and epistemological divides. Le Heron (ibid.: 35) describes the workshops as spaces of ‘release’ (‘where participants were free to think with and also outside disciplinary norms’) and engagement, where, despite whatever political economy or post-structural ideas participants brought with them, ‘everyone was able to engage’. Rather than meetings of the converted, the workshops used ‘governmentality’ to generate boundary-crossing conversations.

The workshops had a number of effects. Most notably, in Le Heron’s terms, they held up academic subjectivities to scrutiny, asking ‘how we cultivate ourselves as thinking subjects’ (ibid.: 36). In so doing, they enlarged the intellectual commons, enriching the quality of geographical scholarship on the neoliberal state and the neoliberalism of everyday life and catalysing some of the growth of interest in both the critique of neoliberalism and the rise of governmentality analysis in geography. The workshops demonstrated that all this might be achieved and that knowledge might be made performatively and unexpectedly political. They created debates between political economy and post-structuralism in what were safe spaces by comparison to major conferences or the journals, and spaces where no one had straightforward answers. And they put these various effects and governmentality insights about the constitutiveness of practices and relations in terms of both affect and effects (the how of what is) at the heart of a new political turn in the form of a PSPE, the shape of which they themselves enacted into being.

The Canberra workshop established new conversations between the PSPE that was beginning to develop in Gibson-Graham’s work and that which was nascent in Larner and Le Heron’s governmentality project. The prologue to Gibson-Graham’s *A Post-Capitalist Politics* (2006), for example, discusses her shift from Marxism to feminism and post-structuralism, and more as a set of productive inflections than rejections. While not labelled PSPE, this intellectual journey, together with her community economies project, her rejection of capitalocentrism and essentialist conceptions of ‘the economy’, weak theory, engaged politics, and the political projects of
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diverse and community economies looked, from New Zealand, very much like a version of PSPE. In this, the economy is denaturalized as a categorization of material activities brought into being by a complex set of technologies and practices (ibid.: xiii); and ‘loses its character as an asocial body… [to become instead] a space of recognition and negotiation’ (ibid.: xxx).

As Larner and Le Heron continued to develop PSPE, governmentality insights themselves remained central to their own work on the neoliberal university (Larner and Le Heron 2005), the local state (Le Heron 2009; Wetzstein and Le Heron 2010), globalizing networks of economic and political practice (Larner 2007; Larner and Laurie 2010); and the notion of after-neoliberalism as post-structuralist antidote to the homogenizing accounts of ‘roll-out’ and ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism and their effects on geographic knowledge of neoliberalism (Larner et al. 2007; Lewis 2009). In what follows, I point to how these insights became entangled in the genealogy of what a group of New Zealand and Australian economic geographers have come to label PSPE (see Larner and Le Heron 2002; Le Heron 2007; Lewis et al. 2013).

Post-structuralist political economy: crafting a political project of knowledge production from a productive critique of neoliberalism

The particular PSPE fashioned in Auckland built on a critique of political economy accounts of economy and its central categories of knowledge, which we portray as macro, abstracted, disembodied and disembedded, agentless, and politically blunt (Lewis et al. under revision).

Without rejecting the central place played in the production of space by investment trajectories and their structuring, we sought a sharper and more political critique of neoliberalism and an understanding of economy capable of capturing its messiness. Readily observable yet obscured by political economy, this messiness included the presence of many more economic actors beyond capital and labour, a sense of the mundane and the everyday, the presence of economic subjectivity (especially in consumption), other ordering practices such as calculation, experimentation, and performativity, and the possibilities of moral economy. To understand investment trajectories, then, we figured that we needed new objects of analysis, a ‘theorization away’ from messy empirics, and new methodological schema. Further if investments and institutions were embodiments of alterable practices and contingent/uncertain agency, not only must economy be re-visioned but so too must politics (see Lewis et al. 2016). We began to seek an economic scholarship more attuned to the messy, agentic practice of economy, and one that asked how academics might ‘do the politics of knowledge’ (Le Heron 2009).

What then do we mean by PSPE? Its core propositions begin with a recognition that investment processes shape our worlds and our different places in them, and that they are shaped by actors, institutions, and micro-politics that take situated, geographical forms and exert agency. The list goes on: economies exceed capital-market-firm-labour configurations and are messy and emergent; economic agency is relational; the economic categories that structure economic knowledge are made and make the world; and structuring work is performed amid this messiness by political projects. Far from being prefigured, despite the structuring work of knowledge categories and political projects, the economies that emerge are open relational assemblages (Lewis et al. 2016). The upshot is that politics is possible and needs to take the form of challenging knowledge categories and destabilizing political projects. This implies a certain wildness of approach that asks alternative questions, emphasizes the making of economies rather than discerning their structural forms, engages with unlikely actors and initiatives, works through encounters rather than projects, mirrors the messiness of social reality, and challenges scholars to break away from existing approaches.
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To practise such a politics requires, and can be practised by, assembling political projects of knowledge-making that make visible the invisible, give voice to the silent, theorize weakly away from messy empirics, involve a wildness of research, work with other agents in making the world otherwise, and above all commit to enactive knowledge-making practices in multiple situated settings. At core is precisely the call made by Ferguson (2011) to do more than denounce, and to recognize that this may take all manner of humble as well as heroic forms. For Gibson-Graham, this is the community economies project; for the group of antipodean economic geographers, of which I form a part, it is intervening alongside institutional actors to ask different questions and trouble assumed knowledge in the theorized ‘hope’ that state–capital relations might conceivably be enacted differently at some scale in neighbourhood or city planning, environmental practice, regional development initiatives and so on. This is what Carolan (2016) and Lewis et al. (2016) are calling a turn towards a more constructive critical moment or an enactive politics of critical research.

My argument here, however, is not that PSPE is a readily distinctive, fully formed, or self-contained approach or that it represents a decisive assault on extant paradigms; it is more that PSPE issues a licence and imperative to ask different, more agent-centric questions in new ways. My point in this chapter is to suggest that it stands as a demonstration of the productive force of governmentality thinking. The points of entanglement of governmentality analysis and PSPE include deconstructing and denaturalizing taken-for-granted arrangements of power, denaturalizing the categories of economy by which we come to know these arrangements and perform them into being, rethinking economy as a messy, embodied and social space of government, recognizing the state to be only one of multiple authorities and formations of expertise involved in rule, grasping the productive nature of power, and glimpsing a politics of both incomplete reach and contradictions among technologies of the self and domination under neoliberalism.

Governmentality analysis also points to the scales of practice and micro-technologies required to understand power and social formation, and to the influence of the discursive realm that contains, represents and leads us to perform the common sense of the economy. In so doing, it identifies a wider range of the relationalities that matter than critical economic knowledge received from political economy, and also highlights their situatedness in contested power-knowledge relations and resultant unevenness, instability, partiality, and incompleteness. It suggests at least a partial open-endedness, and while pointing to the omni-presence of power and its configuration into powerful programmes of rationalities and practices, it also suggests the possibility of politics in the departure of the actual effects of any programme from its aims and a history characterized by the permanent ‘failure’ of programmes.

The turn to an enactive politics was foreshadowed in both the aims and demonstrated effects of the governmentality workshops, which went on to encourage Le Heron and Lewis to participate fully in New Zealand’s Building Research Capability in the Social Science experiment and influence how it was practised (see Le Heron et al. 2011). It also resonated in Larner’s work with David Craig and others in negotiating local and national welfare state rationalities with local government partners (Larner and Craig 2005), and in the engagement of McGuirk, Dowling and O’Neill with institutional actors in Sydney (McGuirk and Dowling 2009; McGuirk and O’Neill 2012). Our governmentality-influenced counter to the ‘neoliberalism of it all’ was assembled in a Special Issue of Asia Pacific Viewpoint titled provocatively Progressive Spaces of Neoliberalism? (Lewis 2009). Significant in this work, and in the theorizing of after-neoliberalism, was the governmentality inflected notion of political project (Larner et al. 2007), a situated and unstable alignment of political narratives, material interests, and technologies of government into a project that both explained and sought governmental force (knowledge economy, global warming, sustainable development, globalization and so on).
These features of PSPE take in more post-structuralist influences than just governmentality. Indeed, PSPE drew on Callon (‘performativity’, ‘research in the wild’), Mitchell (‘rethinking economy’), Barry (‘anti-political economy’), Ferguson (‘anti-politics machine’), Carolan (‘I do therefore there is’, ‘experimentation’, ‘difference power’), Thrift (‘non-representational theory’), Mol (‘multiple ontologies’), Law and Urry (‘enactment’), and Deleuze (‘assemblage’) (see Lewis et al. 2013). However, governmentality was the point (in time–place and epistemology) where Larner, Le Heron and Lewis started their journey as economic geographers concerned with neoliberal restructuring but increasingly sceptical of the merits of political economy as it was practised. And there is little doubt that it performed as a disruptive knowledge project, which was given particular embodied and socialized forms in the governmentality workshops. It encouraged the Auckland-based geographers to use workshops to facilitate a politics of knowledge production with actors beyond the academy (see Le Heron et al. 2011), and gave them confidence to challenge the political effects and affect of political economy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter questions the productivity of governmentality thinking in economic geography. At stake is a need to rethink the political spatiality of economy in a way that sustains economic geography’s epistemological usefulness over other critical economic analyses. Governmentality helps it escape the weight of lumpy categories on its explanatory powers and political potential to address new audiences in ways that allow for it to roll disruptively with neoliberalism (see Keil 2009) in the search for a politics and meaningful intervention. My colleagues in agri-food scholarship have been grappling creatively with this challenge for some time. They observe that the ‘very idea of ‘post structural… political economy’ speaks to paradigmatic disciplinary struggles. In geography it points to the struggles faced by political economists working with realist critiques of capitalist social transformation to grasp the incisive and deconstructive analytics of Foucauldian and actor network ideas. On the one hand, there lie the materialist categories of investment, accumulation, labour and the corporation, and scalar hierarchies of nation, region, neighbourhood, community that defined geography’s approaches; and, on the other, the deconstructive impulse that recognizes them to be analytical and/or constructed rather than ontological. PSPE attempts to find a critical creativity in the collisions between a political economy critique and the deconstructive critique of post-structuralism.

In this chapter I suggest that governmentality analysis has catalysed the turn to a particular PSPE in New Zealand economic geography. It taught us that the messiness and complexity involved in the struggles around subjectivity offer a more nuanced and finely grained analysis of governing and economy than accounts of the ‘neoliberalism of it all’. It also taught us that it is hard to properly grasp political-economic structures without understanding how they are constituted, co-created, and enacted. This chapter is, however, more a story of the generative capacity of governmentality in a particular place at a particular time than an advocacy for further governmentality-inspired deconstructions of the power relations of economic initiatives. It demonstrates the potential creativity residing in the tensions across which governmentality analysis is put to work (Ettlinger 2011). It is this creativity that future governmentality analysis ought to seek to uncover, particularly its potential to be political. In McKee’s (2009) terms, it is precisely this potential that might allow us ‘to put back in’ the concerns with the role of the state, politics and social difference that governmentality analysis is accused of ignoring.
References


