

**„Participation“, in: Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft im Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V. (Hg.), Ars Viva 10/02 Kunst und Design, Berlin 2001.**

**Pro qm:** *Last year, the book you co-edited. "Gouvernementalität der Gegenwart. Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen". was published. Under the perspective of "governmentality", the various essays examine the extent to which techniques of power and "technologies of the self" can be linked together and situated in a neoliberal agenda. From this expanded point of view, it seems possible to more closely analyse neoliberal power mechanisms in areas as diverse as the insurance industry, genetic engineering, management theories, municipal administration, entertainment architecture or criminology. How would you roughly outline this perspective?*

**Thomas Lemke:** The concept of governmentality originates from Michel Foucault's comprehensive concept of government which refers not only to political processes or state agencies, but in a more general sense to the art of guiding people. This theoretical perspective is interested in the interplay between forms of knowledge, power strategies and modes of subjectivation. It concentrates on those rationalities and technologies that aim to systematically direct and control individuals and collectives containing forms of self-government well as forms of governing others.

On the one hand, this perspective draws its theoretical significance from the fact that it circumvents traditional sociological and political dualisms. Thus, the difference between ideology and truth, state and market, compulsion and consensus is not conceived as a starting point and foundation, but as an instrument and effect of social relations. On the other hand, this makes it necessary to rethink established patterns of critique. Forms of critique that highlight the ideological character, the economic content or the repressive effects of neoliberal practices do point out important aspects of this governmental technology. The problem, however, that they underpin their resistance with exactly those concepts that - according to their own claims - should actually be the object of criticism. The analysis opposes knowledge to ideology, politics to economy, subjectivity to power, without reflecting what role such dualistic juxtaposition play in constituting, establishing and stabilizing liberal-capitalist forms of regulation. In my view, the analytical significance and critical contribution of the perspective of governmentality lies precisely in the search for structural relationships between the production of knowledge, strategies of power and technologies of the self: in the attempt to bridge these dualisms in order to reconstitute them on a "plane of immanence" (Deleuze/Guattari) or in an "inside without an outside" (Foucault).

*We chose the concept of "participation" as a foil for our exhibition project because, in the claim to participate, the protect of an emancipatory practice targeting the level of negotiation created by power can be demonstrated in an exemplary way along the lines of a historical development in several areas. e.g. in self-administration of City districts or in architecture with flexible ground-plans, in the area at museums and exhibitions with their development of display techniques oriented toward mediation or in the field of theaters experimenting with the dissolution of the picture stage. However, in the age of late capitalism, this claim to participation combines itself with a neoliberal grammar of "inclusion", "activation", "empowerment" and "making responsible", and the actual emancipatory content disintegrates in a refined setting of modern technologies of rule. How could one describe this change of meaning.*

**Thomas Lemke:** An important aspect of neoliberal forms of government lies in stimulating others to act i.e. not preventing or restricting certain forms of action that much, but rather promoting or even demanding them. The concept of governmentality allows these aspects to be elaborated more precisely. Viewed from this theoretical vantage point, the issue is neither replacing the political with the personal, nor extending the political into the private realm, but linking political transformations to the constitution of new technologies of the self.

The production and circulation of forms of participation and inclusion are of strategic significance for

the specific profile of neoliberal governmental techniques. Increasingly larger realms of society, which were hitherto regulated by specialized and authorized state apparatuses, are not left to (civil-)societal processes of negotiation and mechanisms of self-organisation. Seemingly, everything can be negotiated - under the restricting precondition, however, that these rights to participate in decision-making operate on the grounds of an all-embracing reality principle, namely the orientation of one's own existence toward criteria of economic efficiency as well as toward entrepreneurial considerations. Let me make clear with two examples how neoliberal technologies rely upon forms of self-organisation and individual and collective mechanisms of participation in order to implement them for the sake of economic profit strategies and sociopolitical goals.

"Self-determination" and "autonomy" were demanded in the social struggles of the '60s and '70s vis-à-vis an authoritarian factory regime. Today, they are integral components of the "new economy". "Co-determination" is given a selective format, reducing the radical claims once associated with it to a "realistic" level, while simultaneously securing its function as feedback control, (it is no coincidence that "autopoiesis" is one of the key concepts of system theory). The guiding principle when implementing participatory mechanism that harmonize company goals with individual lifestyles is neither satisfaction nor liberation, but pacification: the willingness to take on responsibility becomes an instrumental of rationalization; commitment is demanded and cooperation made a duty. The "personal dimension" does not hinder or impede achieving company goals, rather, it serves as an indispensable resource for simultaneously increasing productivity and motivating staff.

The transformation of production structures is only possible when individuals transform their relationship to themselves and to their labor. They should not only work in an enterprise, but also act like an enterprise, meaning they should manage risks, make investment decisions, maximise profits and reduce costs in their professional as well as in their private lives. These "entrepreneurs of the self" are urged to face market compulsion on their own responsibility and in an active way in order to bring their entire existence in line with maximizing the "value of life" or "quality of life".

A further example of the linking of active cooperation and participation with mechanics of rule and exploitation is shown in Barbara Cruikshank's investigation of government programs in the area of social politics in the United States during the past 30 years. For Cruikshank, as opposed to many radical critics of society, power reveals itself not only in excluding social groups by refraining from action or decision-making, but also in forms of involving people in structures of action and processes of inclusion. Viewed from this angle, power is neither conceived as a zero-sum game, nor could the dichotomy of power and powerlessness be maintained. Quite on the contrary, Cruikshank shows in her analysis how self-government and "self-empowerment" form themselves elements of power relationships. Instead of being a means to fight exclusion and marginalization, concepts such as "empowerment" or "self-esteem" can be regarded as governmental techniques that simultaneously constitute and transform the subject's ability to act. One cannot speak of a quantitative change from less to more power, either. The "discovery" of an "active citizen" is - just like the interest in strengthening the responsibility and decision-making competence of local communities - not only a gain in participatory opportunities and rights to a share in decisions, or the sign of an increasing political democratization of society; it mainly signifies a qualitative change of forms in which subjectivity is established, the creation of new, social collectives and identities: a "counterevolutionary" movement proposing "controlled" forms of action that chime with the aims of governmental programs.

*Where, from this perspective, do you see a place to think "protest/refusal"?*

**Thomas Lemke:** First, let me make sure to avoid a double misunderstanding: this form of analysis neither aims at reviving Max Weber's pessimistic notion of an "iron cage" with different concepts, nor does it subscribe to the idea of a value-free, or neutral theory, the genesis and validity of which can principally be disconnected from power relationships. The attention given to the close interrelations between rationalities and technologies of government serves to make evident the arbitrariness and contingency of these connections in order to strip them of their "self-evident", "normal" or "nature" character, which essentially contributes to their functioning within the power relationship. This "problematization" (Foucault), however, does not serve at all to illustrate the proposition of the inevitability of domination; on the contrary, it should allow other practices and forms of subjectivity to become conceivable and make visible new, emancipatory spaces of freedom and "lines of flight" (Deleuze/Guattari). It is a theor-ethical movement not aimed at discovering, who we "essentially" are, but

at determining who we could be and who is exactly meant with this notion "we": Who has a part in this collectivity, whom does it exclude? In this respect, critique refuses to accept who we are, while at the same time affirming individual and collective subjectivities which are "freer", "more emancipatory", and "more egalitarian" than those in which we presently live. In short: it is all about articulating a different desire, a new collective will. Marx already saw this clearly when he spoke of critique not being a passion of the head, but the head of passion.

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Übersetzung: Karl Hoffman