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Re-Imagining ‘Event Management’: on Governmentality and its ‘Afterlife’

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Abstract

In an important collection of publications Chris Rojek (2013a, 2013b and 2014) raises some apposite questions pertaining to ‘Event Management’ as a source of ideological power that surrounds both the staging of Mega Events and ‘Events’ as a subject field. The present article begins by elaborating on the key themes emerging from Rojek’s unconventional understanding of ‘Event Management’ which provides the backdrop against which it advances its own arguments. The rest of the discussion develops a novel framework of analysis which suggests that we should substitute ‘governmentality’ for ‘ideology’. It is argued that ‘performative governmentality’ achieves the rule of the ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘knowledge’ as the ruling force in a new way, through ‘efficiency’. The article provides a familiar theoretical framework and equips it with some new conceptual tools. Performative governmentality emerges as the ‘afterlife’ of Foucauldian governmentality, demonstrating that its capability is released only when the context in which it originally existed has disappeared, when it lingers precariously on the verge of disappearance. The article posits a mutual ‘fit’ between sport and the ‘social gradient’ in health and the tasks these pose to individuals under the dramaturgical conditions of the ‘performativity criterion’: to produce for themselves in their leisure the knowledge and the techniques of ‘fitness’ or ‘well-being’. Thereafter it explores how control operates with the societal shift from ‘hierarchy’ and ‘normalization’ to ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’, arguing that existential insecurity and ontological uncertainty – the products of the fear of invisibility – have become functional to performative governmentality, which appears capable of conjuring conformity through impulses we conventionally associate with empowerment.

Keywords Efficiency · Event management · Governmentality · Health and ‘fit-ness’ · Neoliberalism · Performativity

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1 Introduction

The response to a successful bid to host a Mega Sport Event is like the first moments of a supernova – the sublime flash of light and the release of enormous amounts of energy. Zurich, 15 May 2004: ‘The 2010 World Cup’, announced FIFA president Sepp Blatter, ‘will be organised by ... South Africa!’ Former president Nelson Mandela then climbed on to the stage, lifted the World Cup trophy in the air and said: ‘I feel like a young man of 15 [years of age]’. The South African bid Chief Mr. Irvin Khoza responded in kind: ‘This is for Africa. This is for African renewal’. ‘Ke Nako’ – Celebrate Africa’s Humanity.’ These celebrations sparked immediate attention in the academic community and journals across the globe started to accept publications relating to the 2010 FIFA World Cup a full five years before the Event.

Closer to home, the announcement that an African nation had won the bid provided one of us (at the time an early career researcher) and other colleagues on the continent with the opportunity to develop a critical and rigorous understanding of this Mega Event. The groundwork had been laid fifteen years earlier with the 1995 Rugby World Cup when some scholars had begun to ask critical questions raised about the assumed efficacy of Mega Sport Events as drivers of positive social change. In this respect, the critical insights of Coetzee (2001) on nationalism had been particularly influential. The apartheid regime that had structured South African society throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century came to an end in 1991. As Coetzee convincingly argued, the 1995 World Cup was first and foremost a vehicle for promoting a new rendering of the South African nation. The narrative went something like this: apartheid has collapsed and a new era is about to dawn. True to form, Benedict Anderson’s (1983) imagined political community was used as the mother of metaphor. But the appointed metaphor was borrowed from Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s ‘Rainbow People’, modified for the Event, by festooning it with images of post-apartheid South Africa, and turning into the ‘Rainbow Nation’. The mental phenomenon in the metaphor carried the meaning: physical reality, the facts of history, are what they are, but if we make the right noises and select the right images, and use them to create a consistent message, then we can create the nation anew.

Fifteen years on the globalization process had helped secure the rise of yet another ideology in the form of neoliberalism and the stage was set to develop a critical and rigorous exploration of the impact of this phenomenon on the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Our original ambition in writing the present article was to critically reflect on this intellectual legacy and the lessons learned. We conducted a thoroughgoing review of most if not all of the literature published on the World Cup, identifying some 185 articles from a vast array of research projects conducted before, during and after the Event with the view to unpacking and mapping out its knowledge legacy. To our disappointment we found that this literature was largely uncritical, reconciled to the status quo and conducted in the manner of the burgeoning subject field of ‘Event Management’ (Rojek 2013a, 2014), which is populated by value-free technicians of an alleged science who stress the importance of identifying, evaluating and appraising Mega Event ‘legacies’ (see for example Chappelet, 2012).

As this criticism suggests, Rojek understands ‘Event Management’ in a thoroughly unconventional way and few, if any, scholars working in the fields of ‘events management’ and ‘event studies’ will be familiar, or if they are, happy, with it. In his view

'Event Management' is as an abomination that has undermined the freedom of individuals in their leisure and helped displace the study of leisure in universities. As he sees it, his guiding task is to engage in the ideological struggle for ideas in the academy in order to reaffirm the 'critical tradition in Leisure Studies which supports a more radical perspective on leisure' (Rojek 2014: 32).

To write about the place of the Mega Event in the contemporary world, about its role as a powerful carrier of embedded social and cultural norms and rules, and about its impact on societies and individuals in their leisure, is an attempt by Leisure Studies scholars to engage themselves as the active subjects in the study of the world. Rojek has met this challenge in two studies of razor-sharp judgement and penetrating critique. Rojek (2013a, 2014) argues that the study of Mega Events and its taught curriculum in universities today is very much like its topic: big business. But unfortunately it is through the influence of business-sponsored thinking that the study of Mega Events is in the main conducted. For over two decades most scholarly activity in this field has operated uncritically in the belief that the best way to assess Mega Events is in terms of how they deliver on the economic, social, cultural, political and environmental dimensions of their 'legacy' promises, the accent placed firmly on 'a technocratic bias in what Event managers do' (Rojek 2014: 39). As a critical response to this trend, and following Rojek's lead, the overarching aim of the present article is to demonstrate how critical thinking about Mega Events can be made more relevant to Leisure Studies.

In his scholarly trajectory, Rojek has often conducted his work in a similar manner to Anthony Giddens in sociology: theorizing phenomena and illustrating them with examples. He is immensely learned and very good at doing this. But the reason Rojek conducts his work in such a manner is that he is often attempting to get to grips with topics that have not been studied empirically in any critical way. This approach to Leisure Studies no doubt causes a certain degree of annoyance to those committed to empirically formed research. But with regard to the present topic a 'theoretical-example' approach is a necessity rather than a choice.

These observations notwithstanding this article has been written as a rejoinder to Rojek's work. He argues that the professionalization of events studies, its transformation into an academic discipline, has been hampered by the neoliberalization of higher education which has foregrounded 'Event Management', largely at the expense of critical Leisure Studies. However, what Rojek fails to point out is that this has nevertheless encouraged attempts to make event studies into a more critical subject field (see, for example, the important collections edited by Lamond and Platt (2016) and Spracklen and Lamond (2016)). These attempts should be applauded. The more event studies interacts with other critical subject fields – not just Leisure Studies, but sociology, cultural studies and politics as well – the more relevant it becomes, and thus the more useful. This article is written in the same spirit. We want to argue that critical event studies should replace 'Event Management' and it is for this reason we focus our attention firmly on the former rather than the latter. The hope is that this will in some small way help break the hold of 'Event Management' in universities – and, more broadly, of neoliberalism.

We begin the article by explaining Rojek's theory of the ideology of 'Event Management' and elaborating on its key themes of appropriation, manipulation and influence. Rojek argues that 'Event Management is effectively a dualism that operates outside the authority of the state and outside 'the traditional interests in Leisure

Studies[which] is to reflect upon radical, revisionist forms of social and economic organization that will permit work and leisure to subsist in a harmonious balance to achieve progressive ends' (Rojek, 2014: 44). We suggest subsequently that it is only by pressing at the limits of the themes identified by Rojek that it is possible to open a way for thinking differently about the power of contemporary Mega Events. As its title suggests this article is concerned with 'governmentality' rather than 'ideology'. However, it differs from most other theories of governmentality in the alternative picture of 'Event Management' it draws. Most other accounts tend to present governmentality in the way it was originally conceived by Foucault (1991) as the evolution of a practice of hierarchical control and specialized expertise that resulted in the normalization of certain ideals and standards ostensibly to improve the condition of society as whole. After explaining what this entailed, we reject Foucault's thesis in favour of a new understanding of what we give the name 'performative governmentality', which operates on the basis that certain goals – in the case of our discussion the conjunctural shift within the liberal state from 'improvement' and 'health' to 'efficiency' and 'wellbeing' (or 'fitness') – can only be achieved as a by-product of aiming for something else. This alternative way of understanding of governmentality as decentred in leisure rather than being located in the welfare functions of the modern state is theorized by making novel use of Lyotard's (1984) argument that in the contemporary world an equation between the market, efficiency and truth has been established. Thereafter, performative governmentality and its relationship with Mega Sport Events and sport stars turned by star gazers into celebrities is discussed in some detail suggesting that what often appears as normal everyday leisure practice implies a particular kind of 'performance' and a reconfiguration of what is meant by freedom and social control.

2 The Ideology of 'Event Management'

In recent years a number of theorists have provided a critical basis for examining theoretically the influence of neoliberal capitalism on social policy and public services (see for example Blackshaw 2013). Neoliberalism is the term coined to define a global world held under the spell of market fundamentalism (Harvey 2007). In championing classic liberal ideas of freedom, individualism and privatization over representative-interventionist social democracy in the political sphere, neoliberalism has transformed the conditions under which most world economies operate as it foregrounds on the one hand the denial of ideology and on the other the affirmation of entrepreneurship in the light of the opportunities arising from intensified globalization and the substitution of the 'market state' for the 'social state' (Bauman 2012).

Central to this project in Leisure Studies has been Rojek's work on 'Event Management' as an ideological form of cultural politics. In Rojek's view, 'Event Management' combines market logic with a communitarian philosophy to achieve the ends of capitalist reform. It is a specialized branch of project delivery covering a wide range of technical issues used to deliver on the aspirations of the market state through Mega Events. Rojek argues that investment in this area emerged as a response to the deregulation and the rolling back of state activity and the Mega Event has become widely advocated as vehicle for optimizing national competitiveness and reaping the

benefits of entrepreneurship to provide what the state has failed to do: deliver a cheap, widely accessible, meritocracy built on communitarian values. The role of state is merely to ensure the right enterprise structure between entrepreneurs, voluntary associations and 'the people' and to manage the rules that define the right cooperative and competitive relations within the market. A successful Mega Event is one that achieves a sense of 'brotherhood' and the unprompted expression of 'people power'. In this way, Mega Events, Rojek argues

play into the hands of established, semi-invisible social and economic interests. They do so primarily by positioning ordinary people in the illusory location of a 'can do' stance that persuades them that their actions 'make a difference'. Ideology, let us recall, is not so much a matter of naked force or guileful persuasion, but positioning. In urban industrial, outwardly democratic society, it operates optimally when it normalises behaviour and hierarchy. Today, ideology works by making 'the person' political. It aims to convince individuals that their personal behaviour counts, that what they do through charitable acts matters and the world would be a hopelessly depleted place without them. The deliberate, latent objective of all these lubrications is precisely to leave the essentials of the underlying power structures and processes of regulation intact (Rojek 2014: 33-4).

Rojek argues that a striking feature of the Mega Event during the past few decades has been its rapidly increasing homogeneity. With few exceptions, most of them are pretty much the 'neoliberal' same; they are run by the same kinds of organizations which either are or are run like business corporations, build community consciousness amongst people in their leisure by drawing on entrepreneurship and crucial aspects of communitarian thinking, and make the same noises about how they have addressed societal inequality and other social injustices. Here Rojek is advancing an account of the way in which the Mega Event is used to appropriate two human needs that are fundamentally religious in nature and exploit them for economic and political ends: the sense of the transcendent, of the need to identify with something beyond the ordinary, on the one hand, and the need to belong to a tradition, that enables us to make sense of the world through its rituals and collective imagination, which are an expression of that tradition, on the other. It is this unity of perception that gives significance to 'Event Management' and what makes it a powerful tool to distract us from the real issues facing the world.

In theoretical terms Rojek is offering here a basic Marxist framework of leisure which suggests that our free-time has well and truly entered the marketplace so that it feeds back into the economy. His claim that this economic interest is the motor of 'Event Management' and that the principle source of its execution is ideological and founded by making 'the personal' political' is hegemony theory. The most problematic elements in this type of critique stems from features of its thought which are characteristic of all Marxist interpretations. These elements severely compromise the arguments made and can be reduced to two tendencies: the tendency to assume that hegemony stands above social realities and reduces individuals to cultural dupes, who are always making 'choices' without agency which leaves them vulnerable to political manipulation; and the tendency to ignore or at least marginalize issues other than class interests and false consciousness.

3 Decentring Ideology: Discourses, Biopolitics and the Irresistible Rise of Governmentality

These issues, notwithstanding, Rojek is right about one thing: neoliberalism has the extraordinary power of a *primaeval*, ‘spectral force’ which, to borrow the words of Isaiah Berlin, is able to ‘circumscribe and confine and limit, to determine the range of what may be asked and what may not, to what may be believed and what may not’ (1969: 37). Having dissolved the distinction between Mega Events and the real world, permeated the resulting artefact and engrained its market values, neoliberalism makes all resistance look implausible, seem illusory. To this extent it has been successful in convincing all but the stupid (rendering even the most cognisant criticism as senseless is perhaps its seminal achievement) that its reality is the only one.

Foucault, the great French historian of ideas, suggested almost 50 years ago (in his highly influential book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2002) that what such situations reveal in their radicality is a ‘decentring’. Neoliberalism is able to deny its own ideological status because this is hidden from view, which means that it can avoid being recognized for what it really is. According to Foucault every discourse (his alternative to the concept of ideology) has its own ‘order of things’, which it uses to perpetuate its own ‘innate’ superiority over other discourses. Such discourses operate powerfully at a micro-social level to legitimate their authority and because of this the ‘knowledge’ they generate can make them seem as if their ‘products’ *are* the world. Foucault argues if we can liberate these ‘products’ from subjects and their traditions (in our case Mega Events and ‘Event Management’) it is possible to identify the ‘unities’ or ‘orders’ that give discourses their authority.

Although Foucault is critical of the Marxist concept of ideology and is sceptical of its reductionist assumptions about false consciousness, he nevertheless stresses the importance of focusing on capitalism in the liberal state and its influence on the rule of law that protects the rights of the individual, which find their expression in the free market. Where he differs from Marxism most clearly, though, is in his efforts to decentre power and knowledge from the state but without losing the sight of the state altogether. With this in mind he provides a critical ‘guideline’ for trying to get the grips with the intensive and expansive development of the processes of governmentalization which he argues was established by the liberal state in the eighteenth century (Foucault 1991, 2008).

Foucault’s starting point is that the recurring dilemma facing the modern liberal state is ‘how’ and ‘how much’ it is possible to govern its subjects to improve their conditions without undermining human flourishing. This means finding a solution to a persistent puzzle: how to govern like a state but outside the jurisdiction of the state. To achieve its aims the state must acquire the distinctive means to govern that not only correspond to its intensions but also match the social conditions and the culture present in society. This suggests that the Mega Event is perhaps not best seen as a ‘stateless solution’ for tackling pressing societal issues, but, on the contrary, as an extension of the state at a distance.

In the book *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008) and the book chapter ‘Governmentality’ (1991), Foucault explores how a unique form of governmental practice was thus conceived by the liberal state historically. Foucault argues in the eighteenth century a new form of governing emerges in two context-shifting moves: through ‘biopolitics’ (the regulation and control of the mind and the body), which involved the extension of

the scope of state by decentering its power, and 'governmentality' which involved the decentering of state power to professionals.

Expert knowledge is central to governmentality. As Scott (1998: 2) observes, in his perceptive study *Seeing Like a State*, if the pre-modern state was 'partially blind' because 'it knew precious little about its subjects', the modern liberal state is characterized by a *dolus specialis*, or 'special intent', to get to know everything about its subjects. This creates an environment of *panopticism*, the metaphor Foucault (1977) borrowed from Jeremy Bentham to explain how the population is subject to a regime of unremitting surveillance. Foucault saw this trend not as the simple exercise of professional power intent on extending its boundaries, but as a historical shift deriving from a redefinition of the professions under the sponsorship of biopolitics to include psychological, economic, political, social and cultural calculations in order to improve the condition of society. Health and education emerge as the dominant models and the main inspirations, developing new techniques for working directly on the mind and the body, through the functioning of 'micro-power'. Here control is

associated with ordering action, understood as the manipulation of probabilities (rendering some events more likely, others less likely). Effectivity of control depends on the adequacy of knowledge of the 'natural' order. Such adequate knowledge is, in principle, attainable. Effectivity of control and correctness of knowledge are tightly related (the second explains the first, the first corroborates the second), whether in laboratory experiment or societal practice. Between themselves, they supply criteria to classify existing practices as superior or inferior. Such classification is – again in principle – objective, that is, publicly testable and demonstrable each time the above-mentioned criteria are applied (Bauman 1987: 3).

In this way governmentality spontaneously produces 'population' as its register of social improvement. As Scott shows us, 'populations' begin to emerge through obsessive exercises which define and organize and classify and record in a deliberately and intentionally systematizing manner in order to fulfil the ultimate goal of governmental power which is to identify 'deviations' from the unstoppable rise of the norm in order to improve the quality of the population as a whole. In this regard governmentality operates and is based on the inequality of knowledge which goes largely unnoticed because it always remains under the radar of those on whom it is practiced. The upshot is that 'deviant populations' are not only managed but suppressed as they suffer a continual deficit of information, a feeling of social inferiority and subsequent loss of dignity.

4 Governmentality Redux: Enter the Performative Criterion

As we have seen governmentality draws upon the present-day society and its culture for the kind of operations it carries out. With the rise of neoliberalism in the second half of the twentieth century it became increasingly clear that its original designs had become dogged by welfarism, professional power and bureaucracy, which not only negatively labelled particular populations but led to unsustainable costs that were undermining the

overriding goal of social improvement. As a consequence, by the beginning of the 1980s, there was a shift to introduce more efficiency into governmentality.

In the UK, the watershed moment in this development was the election of the first Thatcher government in 1979. Until the early 1980s, cohort studies, following populations longitudinally, had been the state's primary gauge of improvements in the overall conditions of society. These demonstrated in no uncertain terms how the causes of unequal health begin at birth, or even before, and can accumulate through the life course. There were three major cohort studies conducted in the period after the Second World War – initiated respectively in 1946, 1958 and 1970 – which began by examining the medical, social and economic circumstances of babies born in the same week and in the same year, then over subsequent decades monitoring their health alongside social and economic outcomes (Francis 2016). The planned 1982 study was cancelled by the Thatcher government. By assuming that the cost of improving the conditions of society were no longer sustainable through funding research to inform 'calculated' programmes of intervention the government had massively undermined the objectives at the core of governmentality – although a new version was about to appear as its 'afterlife'.

The best available theory for interpreting the origins in the momentous shift in governmentality that ensued is Lyotard's (1984) 'performativity criterion' thesis. Lyotard's starting point is that neoliberalism (not his term) presents the world to us in a radically different way and changes our ethical sense of it, as in *Schöpfung*. It is an extremely powerful 'shaper' that imagines the world is characterized *solely* of economic phenomena, each transforming its own portion 'efficiently' and into a profit that conforms to its own nature. Lyotard calls this sense of *Schöpfung* the 'performativity criterion'. With it, a shift in understanding takes place, and humanity is compelled into a different cognitive mapping of reality based solely on 'efficiency'. The umbilical cord with knowledge as we used to know it is cut and rational evaluation is ontologically displaced. Truth is no longer something that we can measure or verify with data. This is because 'efficiency' is empirically 'undocumentable'; 'documentability' is just another word for inefficiency.

Efficiency is at best elusive; it is under-defined and under-determined. It is simply 'performative', and governed by a more pragmatic aesthetic: if something works, it is because of its *effects*. What these *effects* are is impossible to document empirically. But this hardly matters from the world-view of the performativity criterion, which calls for a different way of making truth claims, a way of thinking beyond the oppositions between 'true' and 'false'.

The performativity criterion had to come up with a new 'category' that could reconcile this difference, even if it could never quite be a 'category as such' according to the terms of the previous 'language game'. This 'category' would not be a new category; it would need to 'be there' already. It would have been happening 'already' and crucially would be already 'happening'. In the event the 'category' that is not a 'category as such' that was lifted from its inferior social position and opened to wider prospects under the conditions of the performativity criterion was 'cool'.

'Cool' is an elusive disposition. Just as there is no certainty about where 'cool' is going to be found, or how long it is going to reside there once we've found it, there is no such thing as a hierarchical notion of 'cool'. It is a 'category' that is not quite a 'category as such' that is governed by a more plural and pragmatic aesthetic: if

something works, 'hey, it's cool'. Under these conditions every performative act must ground itself; every truth claim made must be self-aggrandising. The more dazzling its *effects*, the more convincing truth is, the more likely it is to be 'true', to be 'cool'. The only distinguishing power of relevance that applies to performative truth is its 'shelf-life' which, to borrow an aphorism from Calvin Trillin, is 'somewhere between milk and yoghurt'. Another way of putting this of course is that whatever is 'true' ('cool') under the conditions of the performativity criterion will remain 'true' ('cool') as long as there is a profit from it to be had.

5 The Fall of Liberal Governmentality

Liberal governmentality's shelf-life was abruptly cut short by not one but two revolutions: the neoliberal economic revolution and the revolution of everyday life (Heller 1998). The society under which it had been conceived and prospered was highly stratified and social class differences were everywhere conspicuous. As we have seen the optimal conditions of governmentality were achieved through the maintenance of *hierarchy* and *normalization*. However these two revolutions caused the swinging pendulum of human destiny to shift decisively in favour of *freedom* of choice over *constraints*. In due course identity was turned from a *given* into a *task*, and a task which everybody had no choice but to meet head-on and perform to the best of their ability (Bauman 1996). These two revolutions also gave rise to another important historical expression: 'consumer freedom', when everyone – in spite of their assumed social class positions – began to awaken to fact that performing that task looks more attractive when it is off-the-peg and ready for instant consumption.

If governmentality was to regain its authority it would from now on have to seek to obtain its optimal conditions through more *democratic* means (providing equality of knowledge, skill and understanding) and *freedom of choice* (giving populations the responsibility to transform themselves in the marketplace). What emerged was a purely neoliberal intervention, an economic response, a response of the 'crisis-management' type, an exaggerated attempt to deregulate what was already deregulated, to introduce more 'efficiency' into governmentality, which had been dispossessed of its original regulating devices.

The shift in swinging pendulum of human destiny was related to another important shift in the governmentality landscape: paternalism and bureaucracy. These Siamese twins had become so closely associated with governmentality that it had become difficult to realize the full scope of its original ambitions. With its power bases in ruins and its costs rising, a streamlining of governmentality was a necessity. Under the conditions of the 'performativity criterion' governmentality would have to develop a new 'performative' role in bringing about improvements in the condition of the population. Its designs would have to become less standardized and demand (rather than supply) driven, and its impacts more efficient. This would have to mean a further decentring of governmental practice and future prospects of governmentality would lie in its ability to locate its power in many different sites and, crucially, in the hands of professionals whose credibility is guaranteed by the market rather than their own professional bodies and the welfare state. Here governmental practice would have to come up with a new recipe for how 'improvement might be improved' in the shape of

‘performance improvement’ (Lyotard 1984). The logic of ‘performance improvement’ is contradictory: it demands both less investment (to lower the burden on the public purse) and more (to target ‘problem populations’ but, crucially, in a way that does not undermine their dignity). The designs of governmentality thus would have to become even more elusive to its intended targets, which in the event would mean pulling them together as a *bricolage* in an improvisational way, drawing on activities other than those directly concerned with formal health and education.

The summary outcome was that in order to make itself more receptive to a new social order built on the means of consumption (rather than the means of production) governmentality needed to be deregulated anew by turning it away from the welfare state and into a function of those consumer institutions with the entrepreneurial skill and energy to expand into markets beyond its traditional customer bases. The experts chosen to facilitate this expansion were those with just the right amount of cultural capital: the cultural intermediaries, whose role it is to engage in the promotion and transmission of popular culture in order to legitimate relatively new fields such as fitness, life-style shopping, fashion, popular music as ‘valid fields of intellectual analysis’ (Featherstone 1991), which gives them the power to attribute meaning to what ordinary people do in their leisure time.

6 The Rise of Performative Governmentality: The Social Gradient and the Universalization of Fear

If it was going to rise from the ashes governmentality also needed a better ‘brand’ that would be concentrated enough to serve as the techniques of a broad-based proselytizing campaign, but inclusive enough not to affect the dignity of its intended targets. The concept of the ‘social gradient’ (Marmot 2004, 2015) – an analogy for a perfect meritocratic health system which conveniently ignores structural health inequalities – entered public health discourse as the brand name of this proselytizing crusade to redistribute ‘responsibility’ for health more ‘fairly’. This had the effect of expanding ‘responsibility’ to include *corporate* responsibility and *collective* responsibility, and the promotion of ‘health and ‘education’ through leisure. The essential message of the discourse underpinning the ‘social gradient’ is that as we all create the problems that lead to poor health, we each have a collective responsibility to address them, but we can only do this together. In other words, consensus must be the only measure of success; there is nothing to be gained from pressurizing people to conform to a norm. In this way the ‘social gradient’ is based on foregrounding the ‘health’ and ‘education’ profits to be had from the redemptive power of public approval.

A new phase emerged when the social gradient for health replaced the well-entrenched commitment to improve the conditions of society through the often vicious crusade of normalization. From now on ‘well-being’ would provide a convenient, shorthand label for the social gradient of ‘health’ and ‘education’. However, shorthand labels are notoriously deceptive. Like all decentred control systems the social gradient is one that depends on individuals who regulate their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. But it is one that reflects a conjunctural shift from the rationality of ‘improvement’ to the performativity of ‘efficiency’.

But what does the 'performativity' of 'well-being' entail? As Berger (2001) has suggested, performativity is aimed at giving better shape to perceptions of the presence of 'star quality'. The hope is that, by picking out and emphasizing certain features rather than others, what is not immediately apparent will be brought into sharper relief. When we perform ourselves, then, what we are after is the sort of public approval that comes with the presence of 'star quality'. In terms of thinking about how governmentality operates, this signals a shift from one-way *panopticism* involving the production of responsible subjects able to govern themselves to two-way *synopticism* involving the production of 'ontological hybrids' charged with the endless 'task of realizing the script of their own existence on a stage and observing how others observe them'. This dual position yields the image of

a theatre director who has been condemned to a practising self-reference from early on, and now faces the task of realizing the script of their own existence on stage and observing how others observe them. One can now say it explicitly: in *Homo artista*, the agent and the observer merge to form a single dynamic dual (Sloterdijk 2013: 329).

Under the social gradient the very cohesion of public life is now dramaturgical. This creates a more interactive environment of *synoptic* control. Every one of us is by decree a performer and an audience – even if there is no changeover from one to the other and we must be both at the same time. This interactional sense of 'performing-watching' holds no fears for de facto ontological hybrids. But the one fear that envelopes all 'performers' is the fear of not being watched. In the 17th of his *44 Letters from the Liquid Modern World* (2010), Bauman argues that our culture today is governed by an insatiable desire for attention and this is so pervasive it is viewed as 'self-evident' and 'natural'. As a result it has created a new controlling *effect* on human behaviour, experienced existentially as a source of enduring *fear* (fear of putting on too much weight, fear of losing your job – the list is endless). But the fear that haunts the most is the fear of not standing out from all the others performing on 'the same stages' in the marketplace.

This results in a situation in which everyone is constantly in dramatic mode and where we are fearful that if we do not transform ourselves we will be overlooked – which is virtually the same as never having existed at all. Our choices have been made for us: either we decide to transform ourselves, or we will lose our existence and thus our ontological confidence, resulting in a dramatic loss of identity and meaning. A natural outcome of this condition of existential insecurity and ontological uncertainty is that it makes our cognitive dispositions seem somewhat always self-conscious. It is as if we can't enjoy our own corporeal existence without worrying about whether we are 'fit to stand the gaze of millions' (Wallace 1993). This is because in a society where 'performativity' is the measure of worth, the self (our minds as well as our bodies) must be expressed in a carefully choreographed manner. Under these conditions life becomes a stage on which we hope to discover a sense of empowerment and self-conviction by gaining public approval. But the problem is the more we feel we succeed in developing 'star quality', the more we

require social confirmation of those experiences. The instinct of control under these conditions is limitless, as ‘Orwellian’ as anything in Foucault’s vision of *panopticism*.

7 Performative Governmentality and the Appropriation of the Mega Sport Event

If performative governmentality was going to obtain its optimal conditions it needed a new brand for endorsing the social gradient outside the welfare domain and preferably one in which it could ‘hide in the light’ (Hebdige 1988). Amongst many would be takers that fought for the right to front up this new ‘well-being’ agenda it was not surprising to see the winner (winners are always the ones more likely to be imitated for their ‘star quality’) was the Mega Sport Event. It was perhaps the IOC’s (1994) incorporation of the crusade to democratize sport by enshrining the right in the Olympic Charter that paved the way for its ascension. From that moment the Mega Sport Event had a radical change in focus: it was no longer something we should think of as mechanism for merely exploiting and developing associations in the welcome break it brings from everyday life and societal norms; it had become socially and economically valuable and would have an ethical responsibility to ‘perform’ its value for the culture as a whole.

Its new moral duty notwithstanding the Mega Sport Event was chosen as the perfect brand because it has a certain uniqueness (e.g. we all know there is only one World Cup™), a meaning all of its own, an absolute self-sufficiency. By way of using a couple of oxymorons, we can say that it is this ‘Event-ness’ that makes the Mega Event ‘Mega’ and gives it its ‘star quality’, and allows it to appear as a thing in itself and not as thing that has been manufactured with any other purpose in mind. This is what also allows Mega Events to present themselves as politically non-aligned, dissolving all oppositional tendencies into a morally neutral concept of the whole.

As we have seen the market state is founded on three general principles: corporations, consumerism and communities are better equipped for the task of improving the conditions of the population in a deliberate manner than welfare regimes. The Mega Event’s ability to fulfil this *bricoleur* role is assumed because it is geared towards the expansion of this triumvirate of neoliberal ‘inclusive fit-ness’: it mobilizes entrepreneurial energies, generates aspirations and promotes community activism through volunteerism, in order to fulfil its promise of success. In other words, it is not only its ‘Event-ness’, but its ‘efficiency’ that gives the Mega Event the power to lift us to heights which ordinary mortals could not dream of reaching.

It is the supreme achievement of the Mega Sport Event to substitute surreptitiously a narrative specific to elite sporting achievement for the concrete reality it claims iconically to have surpassed. This transference is a product of intense stylization. Its category is visually spectacular in an aestheticising fashion. It displays incomparable design and beauty woven around the ‘authoritative body of the god-athlete [which] has an immediate effect on the viewer through its exemplarity’ (Sloterdijk 2013: 26). It exhibits shapes of sovereign force: the seamless flow of action, the mastery of skill and performance, apparently effortless yet demanding attention, drawing admiration as end in itself. Hard work and dedication determines what it means to have achieved ‘star

quality'; and these are its watchwords. All this is firmly in keeping with neoliberal discourse and the celebration of individual success in a competitive marketplace. The bearers of these values (professional athletes) remain the same, and the overall value of the Mega Sport Event persists and grows because of this continuity.

These last observations resonate with the Marxist critique of the Mega Sport Event. Donnelly et al. (2012) have argued that professional athletes play a pivotal role in the ideological naturalization of capitalist social relations in that the expenditure that funds them consumes a disproportionate share of the resources available to sport in general. Discussing the Olympics they argue that medal production has become a convenient, shorthand label for an entire mode of class reproduction. Basically, the 'fetishization of the medal' disguises the processes by which power relations and material inequalities are produced. Writing before London 2012 they estimated that the total number of athletes representing the UK would be drawn from 7% of the population and an estimated 50% of UK medal winners would also come from that same 7% of the population. What this shows is that elite sport is far from meritocratic and functions on the basis of economic inheritance, cultural ascription and social closure. But the Mega Sport Event plays a key role in disguising unequal advantages of social class as merit.

Performativity governmentality operates on the basis that productivity and innovation depends on efficiency and those who are the most productive and innovative must be rewarded for their efforts. In this regard its 'products' are performative for a 'society of individuals' (Elias 1991). Its influence is representational: it bears witness to the human qualities and sacrifices being exercised in the manufacture of the Mega Sport Event and in the process transforms what is particular to elite sport into the realm of universal. The essential message is that we can all overcome our 'ordinariness' through determination and self-will. To twist an insight from Austin (1975), the Mega Sport Event takes context specific 'constative' actions that lead to elite level sporting achievement and turns them into 'performative' actions, while conveniently ignoring the fact that certain benchmarks of fitness and ability must be satisfied first. In this sense it provides a master metaphor for the social gradient in health and posits a mutual 'fit' between what we do in our leisure and the tasks posed to individuals by performative governmentality.

8 The Mega Event's by-Products: Celebrities and the Democratization of 'Event-Ness' in leisure's Communities

But the most seminal of the achievements of the Mega Sport Event is to have helped turn elite athletes into sport stars or celebrities (whose distinguishing cultural quality is that of being watched) which in turn radically extended the powers and the ambitions of governmentality by transferring the Mega Event 'effect' into the realm of popular culture. Under the auspices of governmental control the task of expert activity, as we have seen, is to enlighten the unenlightened. If the figure of the 'professional' was the original identifying expert of governmentality, it is the figure of the celebrity that is today central and who becomes the new focal point of power and control.

Terms like 'targeting', 'speed', 'execution', 'delivery' and 'performance' are the watchwords of governmentality. These are the terms that elite athletes embody and make them ideal candidates to fill this new expert role. But this is not quite enough to

become a celebrity. The transition to celebrity lies in the way the athlete conducted themselves in achieving what seemed like impossible and ‘lies in the smile with which he [or she] bows after the performance. It speaks even more clearly in the nonchalant and gesture before [the athlete’s] exit, the gesture one could take for a greeting to the upper tiers. In reality, it conveys a moral lesson: for our like, that is nothing. Our like – meaning those who have completed the course in impossibility, with making an impression as a subsidiary subject’ (Sloterdijk, 2013: 196). What this tells is that to make the transition from an elite athlete to a celebrity ultimately means taking yourself seriously by turning yourself into an object of admiration, into someone who is ‘cool’.

Those able to make the transition are subsequently turned into ‘cultural entrepreneurs’, whose skills are in high demand because they produce surplus value in the sport market (for TV companies, sponsors, and so on), and ‘cultural intermediaries’, who have the power to appeal to all kinds of leisure ‘communities’ as arbiters of truth. Sport stars are the ideal cultural intermediaries because as we have seen their ‘star quality’ enables them to blur social class hierarchies, status distinctions and differences in ability. Consequently the language game of ‘truth’ becomes the language games of celebrities, of whom whoever is the most ‘efficient’ (the most ‘watchable’) has the best chance of being right. An equation between celebrity, efficiency, and truth is thus established.

If governmentality as it was originally conceived set out to improve ‘public health’ in a deliberately and intentionally systematizing manner which could be measured, governmentality under neoliberal conditions sets out to improve societal well-being in a performative manner because of the absence of a ‘norm’ against which it can be measured. In this regard, the opposition between governmentality and its performative successor stands for differences in understanding the nature of the world. The view of order that underpins performative governmentality accepts, first of all, that the world is no longer an essentially orderly whole; second, that we can no longer assume that it has a definite or manageable order; and third, that it has become diversified and multiple as never before. This means that to succeed in its aims it needs

unlimited number of models of order, each one generated by a relatively autonomous set of practices. Order does not precede practices and hence cannot serve as an outside measure of their validity. Each of the many models of order makes sense solely in terms of the practices which validate it. In each case, validation brings in criteria which are developed within a particular tradition; they are upheld by the habits and beliefs of a ‘community of meanings’ and admit of no other tests of legitimacy (Bauman, 1987: 3-4).

The diversity and ubiquity of leisure’s ‘communities’ and their associated lifestyles – from speed walkers to ultra-marathon runners, from birders to sheep shearers, from football hooligans to ground hoppers, from celibates to swingers, the list of heterogeneous unities of people who leisure together under the community banner is endless – making its locations truly conducive to decentred controlling and order-reproducing powers embedded in celebrity culture.

As trendsetters, as examples to be followed, with clear targets to be set and reached, adversities to be overcome and left behind, as a pioneers on the road that everyone must

aspire to follow, sport stars are ideal role models for the social gradient. Books, television programmes, websites, videos, magazine articles, twitter feeds and blogs abound carrying promises to give us access to their lives which exist in that zombie terrain between the competing claims of 'star quality' and 'ordinariness'. The primary objective of these guides to living is awaken us to the significance of our own invisibility and in this process put us in the 'mood' to find ourselves and show others who we really are. In this way they have become our guides to endless well-being. Ultimately these guides to living are used to show us how celebrities turned their lives into an 'Event' and thus a subject a subject of admiration so that we can find glory in it. In this way we can become one of them. We too can begin to grow in value and self-regard. We too can begin to shape our own destinies, finding new aspects of ourselves, located in a person we never knew existed. We too can find a new way of making life palpable, that not only makes us visible, but has the ability to show us what happiness looks like.

What we are describing here is, of course, the phenomenon called the 'looking glass self', which was the term coined by Charles Horton Cooley (1922) to explain how our attitudes about ourselves are shaped on the basis of the perceptions of significant others. It is in this sense that we begin to see celebrities as ordinary people, 'just like us', in whom we can see reflections of ourselves. In this process something so mysterious, complex and potentially transformative happens that it provides us with a radically revised sense of who we are, and which casts us in a new light. What Miller (1998: 108) said of shopping generally is true of this process specifically: it 'is not so much to buy things that people want, but to strive to be in a relationship with subjects that want [the same] things'.

The 'efficiency' of control here depends on the adequacy of the way in which knowledge is performed and interpreted. Substituting *synopticism* for *panopticism*, performative governmentality thus reconceives biopolitics by turning everyday life into a stage set and making it 'Event-full' – another way of putting this of course is it say it is grounded by a 'cool' aesthetic. It is here where power resides, reconstituted in the interactive flow of the constant demand for approval and affirmation. In doing this, performative governmentality sets its sights on changes in mentalities, feelings, and lived experience upheld by the habits and beliefs of a community of meanings validated by those who have achieved celebrity status in that world. It is not interested in establishing any social norms, any firm grounds. It recognizes that systems of knowledge can only be evaluated by those on the 'inside' who have managed to achieve the kind of self-mastery and mutual recognition that is 'fit to stand the gaze of millions' – which, taking all conditions into account, is anyone, or so it would seem. Control works on the basis that every life is free to ground itself; every life is self-grounding. The world is made up of a wide number of choices and it is up to individuals to find the right world for themselves which will enable them to cross from the side of the merely normal to that of the one who has become 'someone', a 'subject' worth admiring 'inside' that world.

Performative governmentality operates with the brilliantly simple conceit that there really is no difference between freedom and social control. As Lyotard (1988) argued in *Peregrinations*, performativity renders the ontological category of 'reality' virtually extinct. As we have seen the pre-condition of 'Events' is that they have a purity all of their own. They are performed in 'open space-time', the void, the emptiness that is

bereft of any proper sense of existence. In this vacuum there are only transformations or makeovers, the production, drama and spectacle of which is a constant, never ending. Open space-time is a non-present presence that exists outside real time. But, to repeat, it is always 'Event-full', revealing itself in the reveries and revelries of a wide variety of leisure 'communities' on a wide range of stages. Here revealing is bringing forth. What is brought forth is true: to misquote Victor Turner, open space-time is a 'well-spring of pure possibility that involves the immediate realisation of release from day-to-day structural necessities and obligatoriness' (1973: 217), conditions, we can add, that encourage democratic tendencies through the 'double' operation of performance and observation, transcending the distinction between active participation and passive consumption. Under such convivial conditions, even the smallest 'Events' must be 'conducted in *dramatic mode*' (Bauman 1992: 184) in a manner 'fit to stand the gaze of millions', which Wallace argues is 'the unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness, and that genuine human worth is not just identical with but rooted in the phenomenon of watching' (1993: 155). This is the constellation of any performative world.

What this suggests is that when leisure is first and foremost a matter of dwelling in irreducibly different worlds, then performativity is the means by which a common leisure experience is affirmed. With the 'Event' forged into everyday leisure practice, performing and observing glorified and ritualistically celebrated, performative governmentality comes into its own. As we have seen it is now 'performance improvement', not 'social improvement', that is extolled, and 'fit-ness', not 'health', that the social gradient identifies as the ultimate measure of the condition of society – a measure that is notoriously absent because there is no 'norm' against which one's 'fit-ness' can be measured. Here, 'fit-ness', defined as 'the capacity to move swiftly where the action is and be ready to take in experiences as they come – takes precedence over *health*, that idea of the standard of normalcy and of keeping that standard stable and unscathed' (Bauman 1996: 24). The success of performative governmentality lies in its ability to instil regulation through the *synoptic* divide between watching and observing, with individuals regulating their own 'fit-ness' and the behaviour of others, which generates the fear of not being watched – a fate in 'performative' world that is worse than death itself. But this is just one aspect of 'fit-ness's' double movement. The second aspect features heavily in heterogeneous leisure worlds described above. Here performing leisure is synonymously associated with 'fitting' into a leisure world and then achieving the ultimate accolade of becoming a subject of admiration in that world. In order to achieve this honour, to tweak Bauman (in Bauman and Raud, 2015: 2–3), an individual must obtain three qualities: first, he or she becomes the object of 'attention', 'scrutiny' and 'contemplation' in that world. Second, he or she is thereby set apart, as a subject of consideration, from other individuals, who are as a result perceived as less worthy of attention; this helps to elevate the individual from his or her existential insecurity and ontological uncertainty. Third, the individual is at the same time promoted to the new status of *the* principal focus – the *main* subject of admiration.

What this tells us is that all leisure worlds have the power to ascribe celebrity status. The centres of these worlds are each and every one of them found in heterogeneous open-space leisure time, containing countless stages for completely independent productions, which are all permanently overcrowded with would be attentions seekers, and in order to avoid a public death we have no choice but fight, tooth and nail for a share of the attention. Performative governmentality, as a decentred form of control and as an under-determined

system par excellence of order-reproducing powers, designates what Rancière (2005) calls a *partage du sensible* (distribution of the sensible) – that is, it individualizes at the same time a shared public space and a particular distribution and regulation of this space. If open space-time is primarily a matter of finding a sense of community through our shared leisure interests then performativity is the means through which commonality of that experience and confirmation of status are affirmed. Under these conditions, truly spontaneous and independent knowledge is ignored, or at best marginalized, and put under control because those with the most 'star quality' know best, producing the ignorance all disciplinary power needs to sustain its authority.

9 Conclusions

After identifying Rojek's 'Event Management' thesis as a noteworthy polemic against a field of study that has failed to grasp the ideological power of the Mega Event and which overshadows critical events studies and undermines Leisure Studies, we have traced the fall and rise of governmental power. This article begged the question: How did neoliberalism, which sought above all to contest this domain of expert control, to challenge its hierarchal power and disrupt its paternalist and bureaucratic practices of normalization, manage to develop a new form of control adhering to what appears on the surface to be democratic model whereby authority lies in freedom of choice? In answering this question we identified the concept of performative governmentality which features a further deregulation of deregulated control that does not appear to count as control as we once knew it.

After explaining the survival of governmental practice through Lyotard's concept of the 'performativity criterion', we argued that the control and order-reproducing powers of performative governmentality posit a mutual 'fit' between the 'social gradient' in health and the phenomenon of the Mega Sport Event and the celebrity culture which it endorses. We subsequently argued that notwithstanding the 'Event-ness' of the Mega Event, sport specifically and leisure more generally have their own instinctive powers for fashioning drama in a wide variety of 'communities' and their associated lifestyles on a wide range of stages: an idea capitalized on by performative governmentality. It was demonstrated that it is through our leisure that we are all incorporated in producing performative governmentality's *effects*, but not in such a way that could affirm or disaffirm its existence. This is because these *effects* are impossible to document empirically. What this serves to show, then, is that the difference between what is 'real' and what is 'unreal' is not quite as assured as we once thought. In the resulting confusion democracy and freedom are appropriated in the march towards efficiency and more profit. Each enters the marketplace so that they can nourish ends of capitalism and the ends of freedom – which essentially amount to the same thing. Now, at last, truly, freedom is in everybody's hands. That really is 'cool'. But the meaning of 'freedom' is not what it was expected to be.

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