

Higher Education and the Government of Things

Aaron M. Kuntz

Abstract

Relational thinking within our contemporary moment simultaneously risks challenging and reinscribing governing norms, including the management of things. As such, resistive orientations to conventional inequities must necessarily extend from a stance of radical relationally, one that develops a more robust engagement with materialism than typically seen in the field of higher education. Thus, I call for a speculative stance on inquiry that foregrounds the potential for miscalculation to intervene within the standardized governance of those material relations that grant us our visibility within the normative order.

Keywords: *materialism, governmentality, things, relationality, biopower, reification, dividual, thingification, educational research, milieu, higher education*

In this article, I engage the relational means of knowing and becoming that are often aligned with current manifestations of the *critical materialist* and *posthuman* perspectives in order to better interrogate the governing effects of higher education and educational inquiry. I do so by layering these contemporary theoretical orientations with what Lemke (2014) termed Foucault's "government of things." There remains a productive overlap regarding the relational logic and radical materialism that informs these perspectives, especially when applied to an ongoing critique of our contemporary moment; one that is striking for its emergent and entangled processes of governing. This overlap is especially important for critical engagements with the inter-related areas of higher education (as both a field of study and a milieu through which processes of governing occur) and educational research (as, itself, a field of study as well as a governing technology). As such, through this article I offer a mapping of relational logic, radical materialism, and the implications of their development within governing traditions. I then use this cartography to consider points of intervention that might interrupt normalizing processes within higher education.

Specifically, I offer in this article a particular reading of governing, one that succeeds through turning humans, relations—all matter—into *calculations*: a quantification of *things* that include affective states. This contemporary context encourages an anti-materialist ethical positioning that severs activities from bodies and asserts logics of preemption as necessary and normal. Importantly, reductive representations of relational analyses, perhaps intended to critique anti-materialism, run the risk of accelerating this very process, resulting in making all things more governable. This is most often seen in research that begins with claims regarding the theoretical need to engage fragmented and multiple subjectivities in place of the traditional humanist subject, only to revert to the assumptions of humanism in subsequent discussion. In such circumstance, to invoke relational logic is to simultaneously operate according to and in resistance of normalizing processes. Such apparent contradiction requires specific and imaginative engagement, practices that point to future possibilities that have yet to take hold. Thus, in this article I make three claims: 1) relational logic and materialism are not new—nor are they inherently resistive—and are often

invoked as justification for governing practices; 2) thinking relationally within a posthuman orientation to material things potentially challenges the governing norm of our contemporary moment; 3) the entangled fields of higher education and inquiry serve as a useful context through which to understand and enact governing and resistive processes.

Pivotal to my analysis is the ease with which contemporary notions of governing pull from extractive circumstances, absencing bodies and places in the rush to produce abstracted *things* that are governable.¹ In particular, higher education has historically played a pivotal role in this government of things, engaging as it does in “thingification”—a governing process that, it should be noted, remains distinct from more traditional emphases on *reification*. Operating according to similar logic, conventional forms of educational research enact the modulation, the “self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other,” that sustains contemporary logic formations of control through education (Deleuze 1992, p. 4). It does so as a technology that makes normalizing relations necessary and inevitable. Thus it is that higher education generally, and educational research more specifically, lose their critical potential, colluding in the manufacturing of practices and logic formations that endure within the very processes they portend to interrogate.

Organizationally, the first part of this article differentiates between two notions of thingification: 1) stems from the neoMarxist engagement with reification as an analytical tool; and 2) situates thingification as a governing process, an extension of governmentality and biopower. Here, my argument (not new, perhaps) is that the latter sense of thingification is most engaged with our contemporary moment and, thus, provides productive possibilities for intervention and change. At the same time, both notions of thingification depend on conventional forms of relational logic and materiality in order to enact governing processes. As such, resistive practices must extend from a different relational logic and a more robust sense of materialism else they accelerate the very processes they are invoked to disrupt. As an example of this normalizing tendency, the second part of this article considers higher education as ensconced in the *government of things* (a process of thingification that draws from and extends governmentality and biopower) and asks how one might productively intervene in such circumstances in ways that challenge the extractive and preemptive logics of our contemporary time.

Part I: Reification & The Liberal Subject, or, How Processes of Reification Depend on the Liberal Humanist Subject for Articulation and Extension

From the traditional Marxist perspective, *reification*, of course, involves the re-articulation of social relations as a commodified association among objects.² In this process, the subjects of social relations are rendered as passive objects, while commodified objects are treated as imbued with active capacity. Because reified objects articulate independently of the individual relations

1. In my book, *The Responsible Methodologist*, I reference this process as stemming from a *logic of extraction* (Kuntz, 2015).

2. The analytical use of reification has been in dispute among Marxist theorists for some time. While some champion reification as a useful term for critical analyses, others, such as Althusser (1969), criticize its unnecessarily general analytical function when particular and specific engagements are necessary: “The whole, fashionable, theory of ‘reification’ depends on a projection of the theory of alienation...An ideology of reification that sees ‘things’ everywhere in human relations confuses in this category ‘thing’ (a category more foreign to Marx cannot be imagined) every social relation, conceived according to the model of a money-thing ideology.” (p. 230, n. 7). Wherever one lands in terms of its use-value, reification has continued (fashionably) as a critical term for writers who invoke Marxism, particularly within the field of education. And yet it is not always used carefully, or with deliberate intention (hence, my critique that follows).

they now represent, reification extends as a process of alienation, a violent separation of the individual subject from the objectified world.³ Sangeeta Kamat (2002) aptly writes of reification as the,

freeze-drying of social relations into things...A sort of sucking dry the body politic of its juices, its fibre, emptying it of its history, so that it can harmlessly circulate in the form of a thing. Anyone can then pick it off the shelf and know it as the same thing, for its contents have been labeled, as particular qualities of the social body (much as the contents of a cereal box are labeled). (p. 84)

Importantly, though social relations are emptied of any animating quality, they nonetheless “circulate in the form of a thing.” That is, reified things are not fully static—they still move and are in-relation. Thus it is that reified things extend their relation, external to that which they relate; paradoxically, they move and yet relate as static, unchanging things.⁴

Pivotal to their relational value, these reified objects-in-relation are imbued with standardized timeless meaning—individuals can only adapt to the reified, they cannot change them (hence the object-as-active, subject-as-passive inherent relation of reification). An example of this may be seen in responses to “the economy” as individuals strive to gain the skills and abilities recognized by the ever-changing and ever-determining global economy of inevitability. *The economy* is situated as a *thing* to which others must react; a *thing* that “naturally” determines the worth and value of one’s work—one’s productive capacity as a worker. And, of course, reification also has affective import as inventions like the Dow Jones Average have been granted affective capacity: it’s rising and falling are said to represent the “mood of the nation.” And, yet, all we can do, it seems, is respond: the Dow rises, and newspapers report positive correlations with consumer confidence in the economy; depression is coordinated by its significant drop in point value.⁵

As another example, within higher education one might recognize how faculty consider academia—or even a more specific field of study itself—as external to themselves. In this sense, *the academy* acts, as Gramsci (1971) describes it, as “a kind of autonomous divinity, which does not think with any concrete brain but still thinks, which does not move with specific human legs, but still moves” (p. 187, n. 83). Thus it is that “the field” is granted similar agential capacity as “the economy”—faculty seek a productive relation to their field, shifting their practices accordingly (consider, for example, the number of grant workshops or assessment trainings faculty attend to better engage a brainless and legless field that, nonetheless, “still thinks” and “still moves”).

And yet, it remains important to recognize how processes of reification depend on and maintain select visions of the humanist liberal subject, if even one that remains necessarily passive. This particular vision extends the mythos of the liberal subject and the values and characteristics

3. Notice also how reification requires an external relation—objects external to subjects (and vice versa). This relation-between is dramatically different from conceptions of relations-within—objects and subjects constituted within phenomena—a point to which I return in Part II of this article.

4. I note this because simplistic renditions of reification often imagine reified objects as fixed or fully stable. Like commodities within capital, such objects still circulate, yet do so as discreet and unchanging things. Such things are *inert*, in the doubled sense of the term—remaining the same even while in motion.

5. Indeed, whenever the Dow rises to a new record it is celebrated in the media: “Dow breaks 16,000! Is 17,000 next?” Conversely, whenever the Dow drops significantly it is treated as a symptom of socio-economic malaise. Thus it is that the Dow is given both *revelatory* and *agential* powers: it can reveal the affective state of the nation *and* it can impact that state via its trajectory. In this way, the Dow manifests as an affective technology of the economy.

that follow such positioning. Returning to Sangeeta Kamat's work for a moment, we might recognize how the reification process opens "an ideal space for the assertion of liberal values" (p. 155) through which individuals might strive to align themselves with the needs of Gramsci's "autonomous divinity" which, in turn, seems to own a rationality unto itself. Thus it is that processes of reification inevitably reinscribe the specter of the liberal subject, determining a path towards self—never collective—advancement alienated from any productive relation to work. In this way, conceptualizations of reification are seductive; they make space for the normalized liberal subject that captures our cultural imagination.

Thus it is that the liberal humanist subject is, in part, born through reification and the subsequently problematic values of individuation are upheld as a standard to which one must subscribe. As a consequence, in order to critique and intervene within the normalizing process of reification/alienation, one must at the same time critique the production of the liberal humanist subject (the very logic that makes the subject possible, a *thing*). Further still, theoretical critiques that fall back to a (seemingly inevitable) reproduction of the humanist subject (as a utopian goal, perhaps, or driving force for social justice) pave the way for a return of the governed, reified/alienated self.

As an example, consider the implications of contemporary work in educational scholarship that seemingly plays fast-and-loose with the differences between *being* and *becoming* (the latter a term that has seemingly proliferated in some circles due to the materialist turn offered by new or critical materialism). Such work often begins with determined explications of subjective or relational becomings as emblematic of open-ended, fluid, and ongoing multiplicities that entangle to produce an unfinished series of subjectivities. Here, matter, intensities, affects, etc. remain necessarily incomplete in their relation and thus point to a yet-to-be-determined future of possibility. Unfortunately, the premise of such a critical start is lost in such cases when the author reverts in later analyses to inadvertent assertions of *being*—as though the verb "to be" could stand in as a synonym for "to become." More than a critique of word choice, my point here is that much of the philosophical assumptions of new or critical materialism (not to mention continental philosophy or poststructural theory) begin with a sustained critique of "being" and the humanist subject that extends from this loaded verb. Thus it is that perhaps well-intended engagements with relational materialism fall victim to the seductions of the humanist subject—becoming slips to being without much notice at all.⁶

All too often theoretical engagements with governing processes of reification necessarily invoke the liberal subject as a counter to this brand of thingification, not recognizing that reification *depends* on the very notion of the discreet, containable, subject for its extension. In short, our critical engagements must simultaneously make impossible governing practices via reification/alienation *and* the production of the liberal humanist subject. As such, new processes of subjectivity are necessary—particularly those that extend from a relational perspective on the world. We must consider newly relational possibilities in order to make possible newly productive means of challenging our thingification. The question remains, however, if such formations are possible within the dominating scheme of reification; perhaps alternative visions of thingification are necessary for radical social change.

As an extended example, consider for a moment the Academic Analytics movement that has taken up residency at many universities. For the purposes of this article, Academic Analytics

6. Please keep in mind that I began articulating this concern with *simplistic* takes on new or critical materialism. For powerfully nuanced work that does not do this, I highly recommend the scholarship of Rosi Braidotti (2013; 2011), a scholar who has had great impact on me of late.

is both a cultural movement within higher education and a business (one that profits from the cultural analytical movement it represents). As a technology, Academic Analytics affords the opportunity to examine faculty production at multiple levels—across colleges, departments, or even at the individual level. Faculty are given a “z-score” that is devised through a combination of publication values: how much one has published, where, citation counts, impact factors, and more. In general, a z-score is meant to represent how many standard deviations something is from the mean—it is a confected representation of difference within a standardized and legitimized context. Each faculty’s z-score is devised through comparison against a population of other faculty both within the university and across the country based on rank and years in rank (for example, an Associate Professor who has been at rank for four years will be compared to other Associate Professors who have been at rank for four years). Within my university, faculty will soon receive a star rating based on their respective comparative value—with five stars being an outstanding score. As you move up in rank (from Assistant, to Associate, to Full Professor) your ranking and star-power is adjusted accordingly.

This context is, of course, rife with the objectified relations inherent in processes of reification. In order to manufacture a z-score, one needs both a normalized population with like values (the mean against which data points are valued) and a representationally conflated series of attributes that are common to that population (the publication values discussed above). Thus, there exists in this scenario a series of relational values (the distance between one’s data point and the mean, or the standard deviation) that stand-in for one’s work as a faculty member; these are the related objects through which faculty are known. Thus, one could *be* one’s objectified z-score, subjected to an equation that gives select weights to one’s quantifiable research outputs (one is, in this instance, the distance between oneself and the populated mean of one’s peers). One could *be* a seemingly more qualitative star-rating; how one’s productivity is categorized within one’s institution (how long before stars are then given colors in addition to numbers?: “Oh, you’re only a five star? I’m a five gold star. Better luck next year.”). One could *be* the number of publications in peer-reviewed journals in a particular year (the very data that make comparison possible). One *is*, of course, institutionally recognized as all of those things, the tangled mass of z-scores, star ratings, and individualized publication records that come together in one’s thingification; that is, one’s objectified relation. Effectively, relational variables are frozen as objectified things—reified objects to which the (passive and subjected) faculty member must orient and respond.⁷

More specifically, given the process of reification, these relations are necessarily objectified and, in their relation, active—one is subjected to the relational claims of the z-score, star rating, and publication record; they simultaneously *stand-in for* and *act upon* the faculty subject. Within such circumstance of determined subjecthood (what one *is*), what is one to *become* (what one has yet to be—the unknown future that the analytics movement seeks to predict or even preempt)? That is, how does one’s fixed representations impact what one has yet to be? This is an issue that will be addressed in part two of this article.

In the end, from the traditional neoMarxist perspective, faculty identity is simultaneously one of reification and alienation. I own not my work, for my work is more than me. I own not any star-rating or z-score—they are the objectified extension of me; they represent me and they are comparatively more than me. They stand in for and point to relations that exceed me as a faculty

7. Though perhaps beyond the scope of this article, this interpretation of the z-score actually breaks the hold of representational thinking: it is not simply that the z-score stands in, or *represents*, the faculty member: within the machine of higher education one *is* the score and its relations. In this sense, what was once representational becomes literal; metaphor fails to hold. I examine this more completely in my forthcoming book, *Relational Resistances*.

subject. As a metaphor-inducing machine, this process of reification is cast within representational thinking (hence its reliance on the humanist subject for meaning making) and this makes possible a host of practices and further representations. As such, my work and my ratings stand in external relation to me; representative of me but decidedly not me. Of course, the “crisis of representation” (Marcus & Fischer 1999) in cultural theory and inquiry demonstrated the dangerous limits of representational thinking: representations inevitably fail to fully capture or contain that which they seek to represent; life is always already excessive. Thus it is that thingification in the reified sense is built on two limiting assumptions—the *humanist subject* and the mythos of *representationalism*. Certainly, academia is replete with research strategies aimed at creating more complete representations⁸—inquiry as the technological companion to reification.

In some ways, the Academic Analytics movement feels like the *Michelin Guide* to Restaurants—wherein stars are given to restaurants that can, in turn, make or break an establishment based on whether they receive a one, two, or three star rating. As a gloss, traditionally, one star means that a restaurant is worth stopping in to while on one’s travels. A three-star rating is meant to designate those restaurants worth going out of one’s way for—so delightful that they are worth a trip unto themselves. Of course, this might be applied to faculty as well: *these one star faculty are worth the odd visit, but it’s the three star faculty that are worth a side-trip away from one’s journey through the program of study*. More ominously, the movement up the star-rating system brings with it recognition and economic stability; decline calls to question the very faculty’s subjecthood. Of course, *The Michelin Guide* is entirely qualitative—inspectors visit restaurants in person in order to understand its function, observing and eating multiple times before a star is awarded—so perhaps the comparison is not fully apt. At the same time, though Michelin Guides do not rely on z-scores, they do invoke a relational and representational logic that similarly enables the Academic Analytics movement. (Hence, it is not simply the method, but the logic that informs the method to which we might turn our critical eyes.)

Further, there is a familiar resistive quality among some restaurateurs whose actions align somewhat with faculty who seek to opt out of or otherwise disrupt these measuring processes. As an elitist technology, not all restaurants are considered worthy of inclusion in the *Michelin Guide*, so it is understood as a great honor to be considered for inclusion. Yet with recognition comes affective components of stress and expectation. Indeed, some well-known chefs have been said to have committed suicide due to their placement within the *Michelin Guide*.⁹ Consequently, some restaurant owners refuse star ratings because they bring undo expectations to their establishments—patrons come to expect too much; the food has become more than the restaurant. *Representation exceeds material context*. As a consequence, some restaurants request to not be assigned a star or, if they must, to be assigned the lowest star possible. This might be read as designing a strategic miscalculation; intervention through opting out or intentionally misrepresenting one’s relation. A similar claim might be made of faculty work: we might step outside the objectification of our work, returning the alienated star presentation as a proxy for our activities. The lazy, slow professor (a book of a similar title has developed a devoted following within the academy [Berg & Seeber, 2016]). And yet, importantly, to do so is to invoke much privilege; the privilege of slow

8. To observe this, one need only look to those standardized textbooks that populate many qualitative research syllabi. These texts are replete with strategies (of interviewing, observing, coding data, etc.) for generating more robust representations. If these texts are any indication, representational thinking is, indeed, alive and well in education and the social sciences. This despite the work of contemporary theorists to dismantle representational thinking, or, at least, put it into crisis.

9. I thank the editor for drawing me to this point.

resistance in a time of hyper-calculation, the processing speed of the statistic outpaces even the determinedly slow resistive response.¹⁰ If you opt out of contributing to the calculating machine you risk not existing within higher education at all or, perhaps worse, enduring new calculations you had not imagined.

All of this analysis of the analytics movement (whether of the Academic or Michelin variety) corresponds with the relational logic of representationalism and reification. Yet, though perhaps descriptively poignant, I do not believe that the neoMarxist enthusiasm for reification (and its theoretically-conjoined twin, fetishization) is entirely helpful given our contemporary moment. We are immersed in intra-active¹¹ contexts that do not adhere to the subject-object distinction from which reification finds its descriptive meaning. That is, we are relationally different. We are *different things*. The necessary assumption of the humanist subject and representational logic bind analyses of reification to an unhelpful place of stasis. And yet it is the seductive quality of the reified relation-humanist subject correspondence that seemingly propels much contemporary theory to play out this scenario *ad infinitum*. Thus, I next turn to a similar process of thingification that more usefully draws from circumstances of governmentality and biopower to provide avenues for productive intervention within higher education as a field or even a milieu.

Much work in contemporary educational theory has sought to counter the problematics of the liberal humanist subject through a shift to a relational understanding of the world, one that decenters humans from the analytical fore in favor of a newly materialist orientation towards knowing and being. Though it is beyond the scope of this article to offer a thorough treatment of these perspectives, I do want to pause and recognize that all perspectives on the world—whether intentionally positioned as *critical* or not—are dangerous in particular ways.¹² Totalizing theories are, one hopes, a thing of the past and, as such, phenomena inevitably exceed the theories or philosophies that seek to engage/create them. This is particularly true for theoretical engagements that perhaps fall back to recreate the very things they seek to critique.

As noted earlier, simplistic renditions of relational thinking—often generated in educational research—conflate notions of being with becoming. As a result, processes of generation (becoming something that has yet to be) lose their open-ended value, becoming victims of closure (an historicized desire for the discreet subject). Thus it is that unnecessarily reductive treatments of relational materiality graft the tenets of posthumanism or critically new materialism onto the liberal subject. In this way, relational logics are utilized to perhaps liberate some human subject to

10. A somewhat amusing aside stems from an inadvertent mix-up involving the most recent iteration of *The Michelin Guide*. It seems that the editors confused two similarly named restaurants in France—one a roadside bistro with a part time cook and working class clientele; the other a decidedly upper class restaurant with two dining rooms and a terrace. Of course, the star was meant for the latter but mistakenly given to the former; a case of misrepresentation. Though the error was quickly fixed, the result had numerous material effects as a number of readers went out of their way to find the roadside bistro, overwhelming the owner with calls and requests. For more on this mishap, see NY-Times *Michelin Star Mix-Up Throws a Working-Class Bistro Into a Media Storm* by Hannah Olivennes Feb. 20, 2017.

11. More and more utilized in critically materialist inquiry projects, the prefix “intra” signals “within” and represents a refusal to understand discreet entities external to one another (as is represented by the notion of “inter”). Such shifts in language necessarily disrupt the easy slippage into conventional formations of the contained subject even as they point to phenomena as produced *within* the moment of inquiry, never existing *a priori* to the research practices that describe them.

12. Foucault (1983) has a well-worn quote on this: “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger” (p. 231-232 Dreyfus & Rabinow).

become...yet another (though seemingly “more free”) subject. Indeed, this might be a useful example for how intra-relational projects become, themselves, accomplices to normalization; governance through the seduction of the subject.

Thus it is that we should pause a bit before we rush in to embrace the relational-thinking of, say Karen Barad (2007; 2003), else we produce a caricature of Baradian or Deleuzian (1995; 1992) or DeleuzioGuattarian (1988; 1972) philosophy; one that perhaps unwittingly aligns such relationality with the art of being normatively governed and thereby loses the radical possibilities for which such perspectives are often invoked. That is, there seems to be a movement within simplistic renderings of critical or new materialism to consider theorizations of entanglement, intra-action, and affect (to name but a few) as inherently freeing, or at least differently productive, for the resistive individual. And the term *individual* is intentional here as these simplistic usages of relational theory often quickly devolve into a perhaps-unintentional re-assertion of the liberal subject (now situated in newly material contexts) and/or a relationally absent and thereby apolitical personhood (that you have your affects and I have mine). The danger, of course, is that these very relations, though perhaps newly configured, make one all the more governable.

Part II: Relational Things, or, Thingification without the Specter of the Liberal Humanist Subject

With such concerns in mind, I want to turn to what I hope is a grounding context of faculty work and educational research as a series of governing practices developed through higher education. The latter is not so much a discipline (as its faculty and practitioners perhaps wish it to be) but more in line with a *milieu*; a term that denotes the operating contexts necessary for engaging the government of things. I read such governing contexts outside the reductive relation of reification and the liberal subject, examining instead the more dynamic—and subtly dangerous—process of thingification as it extends from more actively-relational governmental processes. There is here an alignment between my rendering of Foucault’s *thingification* as a process of governing and the DeleuzoGuattarian articulation of *autopoietic systems*, or, the ability of relational systems to enact self-change. As such, autopoietic systems cannot be “analyzed down” to some fundamental element. Instead, they must be understood through mapping the relations that construct the (self-changing) system. In this way, one might draw a close kinship between Foucault’s notion of the *milieu* and the protean process of autopoietic systems.

Instead of the object-subject distinction inherent in neoMarxist notions of reification, Lemke (2014) asserts that *things* in Foucault’s “government of things” are not frozen entities extracted from contextualized meaning—they do not stand outside, or apart from, relations they are meant to represent—but rather extend as things-in-relation that include human and non-human entities and processes.¹³ Such *things* resist the easy claims of representational logic, exceeding through their very relations the grasp of full representation, and do not require the mythos of the liberal subject from which to claim value. Importantly, the production of things-in-relation makes

13. Notice here the difference between *reified things* (circulating, frozen objects) and this notion of *things* as always in-relation, produced through an ongoing and ever-present entanglement of relations. The former circulates discreet, formed object-things. The latter emphasizes relational things created via circulation—never fully-formed yet becoming-things; things produced by/within their very relations.

all things, for Foucault, eminently governable and, to the focus of this article, differently governable than the alienated subject that is the product of social reification.¹⁴ Indeed, Foucaultian thingification might be shown to make all things—all actions, relations, and practices—more completely governable (not just as alienated subjects). This orientation may also point to alternatively resistive practices so that we might learn “how not to be governed *like that*” (Foucault, 2014, p. 293); acts of disobedience. Further, given the relational framework foregrounded in Foucault’s sense of governmentality (or Deleuze’s notion of the control society referenced above), it remains important to note that resistive practices cannot extend from the mythos of the liberal subject. That is, those who seek alternatives to the normalized status quo cannot begin by pointing to or re-creating a discreet agential subject. Indeed, to do so would fall into the trap of invoking static externalized relations; a tendency I earlier critiqued as a manifestation of neoMarxism and analyses of reification.

As Lemke (2014) notes, Foucault’s later writings on biopower emphasize a relational approach to knowing and becoming that aligns rather well with those espoused by *new/critical materialisms*, a theoretical orientation that has come to the fore these past few years. Moving beyond stark divisions of subjects and objects, where the former has agency over the latter, Foucault asserts that “agential power originates in relations between humans and non-human entities” through the relational environment of the *milieu* (Lemke, 2014, p. 8). In discussing a “government of things,” Foucault (2007) defines *things* as “humans in their relationship with things like customs, habits, ways of acting, and thinking” as well as “things like accidents, misfortunes, famine, epidemics, and death” (p. 96). *Things*, then, are relationally bound; *things* occur at productive intersections and there is thus a density to them that bears mapping. This, of course, is a radically different *thingification* than the objectified-subject and subjectified-object that extends from the aforementioned reification-fetishization binary of old. Namely, one is not alienated from, one *is* (or *is becoming*), the relation. Put in terms of my example of Academic Analytics, one is not represented by or alienated from, one *is* (or becomes), the analytic. Representational thinking gives way to the literal materiality of the immanent-now.¹⁵

Thus, when Foucault (2007) writes, “to govern means to govern things,” (p. 97) we need not read this as reducing all things towards a governable stasis. Instead, there is an important element here where governing means to turn humans, relations, matter, into things that are calculable—a quantification of relations that include affective states—sensations, fears, interests, etc. And yet, we often understand our affective states as exceeding calculus—as more natural than other processes. Affective encounters are perhaps romanticized as echoes of an ungoverned truth, in need of regulation in order to make them more comprehensible. As an example, conventional qualitative researchers often seek to dismiss affective engagements as beyond the grasp of data—external noise that interferes with the production of necessary meaning. More anti-foundational approaches to inquiry (as exemplified by the newly critical materialist turn) seek ways to encounter the affective as productively excessive—its incomprehensibility rendered as its most engaging qualities. Returning to the example of the Academic Analytics movement, it remains important to

14. What follows extends from Foucault’s (2014) notion of *governmentality*, or governance through the normalization of populations. Foucault’s notion of governmentality draws together an assemblage of institutions, processes, practices, procedures, and calculations that collude to target population, resulting in governable subjects. A strong technique of governmentality is that of security—the means by which we are motivated to be governed in the name of security. A full treatment of governmentality—and its distinction from disciplinary power formations—is beyond the scope of this article.

15. For a consideration of methodologies that engage the immediate-now, see Guyotte & Kuntz (in press). *Becoming openly faithful: Qualitative pedagogy and paradigmatic slippage*. *International Review of Qualitative Research*.

recognize that the affective response—of joy, say, when informed that one’s citation counts have increased, or dread at the prospect of losing ground in the analytical ranking system—to such calculations is not external to them. Such affections are developed within the very relations that make them possible—they remain intimately material even as they exceed representation within the normalized analytical system.

A Foucauldian reading of such excess—the productive noise that disrupts the easy production of static data—returns to a relational orientation; one that recognizes that relational effects inevitably extend beyond the reach of calculation. This extends from Foucault’s recognition that “agential power originates in relations” (Lemke 2014, p. 10) and calls to question the easy bifurcation of subjects from objects, individual from social process, humans from nonhumans (or humans from matter, to borrow from the new materialists). Indeed, such distinctions might be seen as both an instrument and effect of governing; establishing and enacting the very boundaries that maintain normative function. Designating these boundaries and reinscribing the very logic that makes them visible and commonsensical is consequently a very political act. Thus it is that conventional research practices, themselves invoked to promote epistemological and ontological boundaries, take on the burden of the political. Researchers are not afforded the privilege of standing outside the political realm; they are intimately implicated because their acts—and the logics they manifest—have a hand in the creation of the political (and the effects therein). From such designations and relations, one important effect is the production of not the alienated liberal subject (as the neoMarxists would have it) but *dividuals*, a relational creation that is pivotal to contemporary forms of governing.

What, then, finally is the difference between traditional engagements with reification and the government of things? To begin, the former assumes a subject that is then representationally replaced by commodified objects, resulting in alienation, a dehumanizing relation that is overcome by a return to the cohesive subject—a unification, of sorts that extends from dialectical moves towards synthesis. The latter, a government of things, recognizes relations not as extensions of some humanist center, but as entangled intersections. These intersections are relationally known and experienced through the very production of the dividual. In this way, the dividual exists on epistemological and ontological (even onto-epistemological) levels. Here, relational difference productively makes possible *something* that has yet to be; an extension of more dialogic orientations to meaning.

The Dividual

In distinction from normalized representations of the individual as a discreet, nonreducible liberal subject (or self), Deleuze (1992) developed the notion of the *dividual*, an endlessly divisible human, subjected to an infinite array of normalizing data representations. The dividual is thus simultaneously known individually (as a unique and immediate intersection of multiple data points) and collectively (the bits and pieces of data that inform a larger sense of a normalized population). The dividual is both/and—simultaneously individualized and massified—and, as such, all the more governable. Deleuze considered the dividual as a primary function of a *control society* (itself a break from the disciplinary society articulated in the early writings of Foucault) and I want here to consider the term as a necessary element of the government of things.

As Lazzarato (2014) terms it, the *dividual* is “infinitely divisible,” “decomposable into partial and modular subjectivities and into multiple pre-individual vectors of subjectivation” (p. 195). As my faculty career arcs through tenure my faculty-data deems me merit-us (worthy of merit

pay), promotable (from Assistant, to Associate, to Full Professor), and employable. My data are pieced together with other data to produce reports for the department, the college, the university—I contribute to data-points of productivity that rationalize my position collectively—as such, through the analytical machine, I am individualized and collectivized simultaneously; folded unto myself within and without the cloud of collectivity. I plug-into, am plugged-into, the subjectivizing machine. Out of the academic analytics machine, the faculty dividual is born.

The production of the dividual extends as a government of things—the thingification of relational possibility and probability—and releases any epistemological reliance on the liberal subject to maintain the normalized status quo. The dividual is to be managed, relationally understood as a collective *publics*: “a circulation of ways of doing things, ways of being, opinion addressed to an audience” (Clough, 2010, p. 634). Thus it is that the collectively-relational value of the dividual-as-publics make possible governance on onto-epistemological levels (the entanglement of knowing with being). Whereas governance from the perspective of reification hinged on epistemological controls (a la representationalism), a relational government of things blurs the distinction between knowing and becoming, integrating governing effects into all elements of life, including the affective. In this way, the governing state, as Clough (2010) notes, is no longer primarily engaged with elements of law but, instead, becomes organized around *administrative function* (of all elements of data, including the administration of affective states). Faculty work, like that of the traditional researcher, becomes one of administrivia.¹⁶ Indeed, educational inquiry plays no small part in this phenomenon of governmentality.

And, of course, the dividual is imminently governable, manipulable. In this way, analytics, as a technology of governmentality, “incites the individual to establish an environment that forces him[her]...to react in one way instead of another” (Lazzarato 2015, p. 11). I adjust, create, an environment that makes my dividualization all the more remarkable and engrossing. No longer external to or created before the governmental context, my activities contribute to the context through which I am individualized and generatively massified. I become with/as governing relations; governing through thingification.

It remains important to distinguish this process of *thingification* from that of the production of reified things. The dividual actively contributes to the individualizing and massifying data-relations that generate the context for knowing and being a dividual; the dividual becomes/is the data and data relations that make it knowable and governable. There is no passive subject to juxtapose with an externally active object. There exist here an active and constructing series of relations within phenomena. This, then, is an intra-active process, one situated as important to the work of *new materialists*, particularly those who emphasize the work of Karen Barad (2007) in their theorizations.¹⁷ However, though much of the new materialists who examine research practices point to the productive power of such relations-within, here it must be noted that intra-action makes possible the governed dividual even as it opens renewed possibility for resistance. The dividual in intra-action with the very forces and relations that make its governance possible; both/and. In this

16. It remains important to note that this reorientation of faculty work to all things administrative occurs not solely because there exists *more* administrative work than in the past (though that may be) but because the very nature of faculty existence has altered such that administrative activity is an extension of faculty practice. In this way, the phenomenon of faculty work both reflects and creates the governing practices of the day (altering to take account of and engage with normalizing assumptions about what faculty can and should do).

17. Not to belabor the point, but what once was an external relation (interrelation) has become an always-internal relation (intrarelation) with phenomena. Phenomena are thus understood as becoming-events, including those researchers who seek to cast them as an object of study. For more on this qualitative shift, particularly as it relates to the notion of inquiry, see Barad (2007).

way, governing as the creation and extension of the dividual is all the more encompassing than practices that are a vestige of disciplinary power. The government of things manifests on ontological levels—not just how things are thought *to be*, but how things *become* in material relation, is the focus of such thingification. Of course, the multiple formations of such governing relations, though seemingly overwhelming in their ubiquity, open-up extended opportunities for moments of misgovernance, or resistance.

Further, it would be a mistake to characterize the dividual—and the relations that produce the dividual-as-thing—as amaterial (or immaterial to processes of governing). In actuality, these relations are profoundly material, extending as they do from actions, flows, intensities, etc. that manifest in what has traditionally been known as the material world. This remains the very point of *data*, *relations*, etc. as not bound by representationalism—they are generatively material. As such, in order to effectively engage within the production of the dividual (and its effects) we need newly productive disruptions to the *logic of preemption*, an orientation within the world that plays a significant role in the government of things and is particularly encountered in higher education and educational inquiry.

Pre-emptive Logic (as Material)

Though perhaps at first glance commonsensical, preemptive logic bears unpacking as a governing force. To begin, preemption requires a predictive component (what might come to be) based on an analysis of the past (what was) that comes to bear on present practice (the immediate now). This collapse of the past with the future in the present simultaneously makes possible and extends the dividual—creating the historical data necessary to predict what might be and the identity that is to receive the intervention. Further, logics of preemption rely on an affective anxiety felt at the level of population that creates the rationale for such intervention. Thus it is that the logic of preemption engages both the relational logic necessary for the dividual and an affective capacity towards normalization.¹⁸

Further, recall the onset of preemptive logic alluded to above in the shift from being (what one is, a subjecthood) towards becoming (what one might be, a possibility), first noted in processes of reification. Simply, preemptive logic refuses notions of becoming (and their open-ended, incalculable futures) in favor of casting back to identity (what one is calculated to be); becoming truncated into being. Often, preemptive logic manifests through the calculation of risk and security as understood within the normalizing qualities of population. It is thus through this process that population generatively intersects with time, making possible future engagements based on statistical renderings of the past.

The relationally temporal quality of population (modulating as it does with immediate/immanent material relations) presents events as *aleatory*, or accidental, yet perhaps accepted simply because they could not be foreseen. Thus it is that the very notion of *security* anticipates some disruptive effect (after all, were all things to continue without the possibility for change, we would

18. As an aside, herein lies an example of the dangers inherent in simplistic renditions of new materialism or posthuman theory—in a race to emphasize processes of becoming as unfinished, incomplete, and just beyond the critical gaze, one risks overlooking the preemptive logic that governs such a phenomenon: resulting policies and practices (similarly unfinished) calculate us into existence in particular ways. Simply pointing to an incomplete, relational situatedness is not, by itself, freeing.

not think to question our security). Practices of security seek to stabilize otherwise disruptive modulations to the circulations of population, working to enhance circulating relations that safeguard normalized order; the way things are or *should* be. Thus it is that security is a conservative move that anticipates risk—seeking to restore an ordered system even as it presumes that such order can never fully sustain. In relation, *preemptive logic*, *population*, and *security* manifest the assumption that uncertainty must be governed or regulated back to coherency—dealt with and normalized.

As such, uncertainty plays an important role in processes of governmentality wherein governance is driven by the threat of material changes to the status quo. Though it is perhaps all-too-easy to recognize the many ways in which our daily practices of living are to a large part influenced by concerns for security and risk, I want to layer this notion with the production of the *dividual* in order to understand its articulation within higher education. This remains important as the logic that informs Academic Analytics extends from the predominant way in which we culturally conceive of threat, imagine its resolution towards some degree of certainty, and foreclose possibilities for becoming otherwise. In many ways, then, the intersection of security, population, and preemptive logic becomes a driving force for accepted visions of reality and, thus, an important form of governing. The governing relations of thingification consequently manifest through a preemptive logic of intercepting and managing those relations that have yet-to-be, yet might still become.

Indeed, to engage with questions of uncertainty means one has to produce *things* that may be managed; relations that produce and sustain an affect of security. Thus it is that Morrissey (2013) writes, “planning for uncertainty means that populations [and their productions]...must be coded, ascribed value and quantified” (p. 799). One cannot engage uncertainty at the micro level of population without generating a series of statistical “truths” that define that population. That is, *population* cannot exist as an amorphous entity—it must be statistically known, rendered, and governed. This is strikingly apparent in higher education, given the increase in a management culture “that seeks to enable, regulate and ultimately govern the contemporary academic culture” (p. 799). This culture activates security mechanisms seeking to manifest some desired (and quantifiable) end and does so through the preemption of possible futures.

Importantly, governance through a logic of preemption does not seek to operate on a necessary binary of normal-deviant (with the expectation that governing seeks to intervene and preempt the manifestation of the deviant). Instead, as Clough (2010) notes, “governance is less interested in the distinction between the normal and the abnormal but in a *comparison of normalities*” (p. 633; emphasis added). Thus it is that the normalization of populations occurs through self-referential and relational processes; normalization feeds itself and does not need an opposite for its existence—it needs no representational certainty. As a seemingly benign example, the field of education generally—and educational research more specifically—is replete with “promising practices”: activities that are shown to be normatively generative, producing effects that work to extend (and govern) select contexts—the process of normalization continues without the referent of the abnormal or deviant (in this case, perhaps, the promise-less practices).

Part of this comparison of normalities extends from logics of preemption as a governing force aiming to not distinctly intervene (and thereby change course to something else) but to, as Deleuze (1992) notes, engage in control through *modulation*. Like a radio wave, processes of normalization flow, bending and changing in form, until aligned into a normalized pattern to produce *something*, a recognized/able frequency. In similar fashion, *dividuals*—and the populations of which they are a part—modulate, becoming “undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network” (Deleuze, 1992; p. 6). The *dividual* in/as network, modulating to produce normalized effects. Returning to the example of Academic Analytics, such relations serve more than a representative

function (representing who I am in relation to what I did the previous year)—they are used to preempt future activities, to warn of my failure to live my faculty existence in productive and otherwise normatively useful ways. Analytics have both a simultaneously descriptive and predictive function—they become the cause for and the extension of the logic of preemption.

Turning our attention to higher education, we might follow the work of Morrissey (2013) to recognize university academics as what Foucault terms a “target population”—the intersection of multiple processes, practices, and, importantly, *calculations* that, through the density of their relation, outline the performing academic subject. Importantly, the faculty member, as dividual, is never complete, has never fully become a discreet thing. Always in perpetual modulation with/in the milieu of higher education, the faculty dividual exists through “a universal form of deformation” where “one is never finished with anything”; perpetual training is the modulating norm (Deleuze, 1992; p. 5). Recall my earlier example regarding the endless grant workshops and assessment trainings faculty endure to better engage their reified field of study. In that instance, the passive faculty member responded to the active field. Read without the binds of reification, the faculty individual and field-milieu modulate; control and governance through the normalizing flows of self-creation (the one is/as the other); *mutual administrivia*. This is the production of the “self-deforming cast” that Deleuze notes is an extension of the control society. Importantly, this incessantly driven system of modulation-control is an example of its autopoeistic formation—a becoming machine of governance.

And yet such relations come to be within a context, a milieu, that grants select meaning and configuration to them. As an educational researcher, I come to understand data as always partial, never objective, and exceedingly political. These analytics never exist in abstraction, absent the meaning-generation of the milieu. Thus, in this last section I would like to focus in on the production of higher education as a particular milieu through which thingification extends as becoming governance/governable.

The Faculty Dividual

Given the production of the dividual, normalizing relations of population, and preemptive logics, what is made calculable by the mutually sustaining logics of conventional higher education? What affective states extend with such calculus? I think it important to recognize the many ways in which faculty are produced as governable things and research (or even teaching) is established as a technology for such technocratic generation. Consider for a moment the contemporary move towards clinical and/or adjunct faculty in place of tenure-track lines. This, of course, is well documented within the literature in higher education. What remains of interest is the particularization of faculty activity that goes hand-in-hand with such movement. Most often, clinical or adjunct faculty are hired for a particular function—typically, teaching—that divides up traditional faculty practices; the productive relation of teaching and research is severed. Such non-tenure track faculty are thus recognized for their quantifiable outputs—the FTE’s they generate or degrees of student satisfaction, for example. This presentation of select faculty value allows for comparison across larger segments—a quantification of faculty work. The result is a reduction of previously intellectual activity to calculated/calculable procedure. Faculty work is segmented, relations among faculty activities severed. Faculty, and their work, as things.

Perhaps more importantly, there remain material consequences for such divisions. Indeed, one need only look to the space of colleges and universities for such outcomes—what makes a

clinical faculty member, as such? A required teaching load? A lack of visibility on university committees? Placement in often-windowless offices (if an office is even a possibility)? Select university norms that are different than mine as a tenured faculty member? Perhaps even an individual's avowal: *Yes, I am that: I am clinical; nearly, though not quite, tenurable*. Of course, these circumstances or markers never exist in isolation, they extend through a milieu. Now place this avowed clinical faculty member within a social context of what some might recognize as an erosion of faculty governance, a decrease in tenure-track positions, buildings that structurally support faculty hierarchies, an increase in an online presence across colleges and universities, perhaps even a felt sense of anxiety or fear regarding politics in the classroom or office-space. Thus it is that such *things* relate and, through their very relation, governance—calculation—occurs. The faculty individual is rendered legible within/as modulating population, a relational thing manifesting through processes of prediction (what might come to be) and preemption (what cannot be); governed into security. Such governance occurs as a productive element of the milieu, a series of effects through which the faculty individual is known. As a result, it is the incessant production of the milieu to which we might apply our cartographic practices, mapping the effects of security and preemption as they develop in the immediate-now.

The Milieu

As Foucault articulates it, the *milieu* is both a set of what he terms “natural givens—rivers, marshes, hills—and a set of artificial givens—an agglomeration of individuals, of houses, etcetera. The milieu is a certain number of combined, overall effects bearing on all who live in it” (Foucault 2007, p. 21). Foucault (2007) further defines the *milieu* as the “space in which a series of uncertain elements unfold” (p. 20). The milieu is thus a space of technological intervention (in the name of security). Further still, *events* come into being, are conducted, through technologies.

Thus it is that the *milieu* is a material set of relations that manifest uncertainly. Security, then, is grounded within the relational *milieu*, seeking to maintain, normalize, and *pre-empt* uncertain ends. For Foucault, the concept of the *milieu* is a security device that conceptualizes and manages population: “the notion of milieu fixes the gaze of those governing onto the circulation of population” (O’Grady, 2014, p. 524). The *milieu* orients governance in particular ways.

Importantly, it is through the notion of the *milieu* that population becomes a governable object, buffeted by the normalizing logics of security. In this case, “population” is productively material—not simply an idea or a grouping of statistical measures without grounding. Instead, “population” encompasses humans, nonhumans, and their co-existing relations, as well as the effects of their relating (O’Grady, 2014). Thus it is that population exists as a materially effected (and effecting) series of intersecting relations, varying along with the intensities of such relations. As such this notion of “population” is far from fixed, but is instead a modulating and circulating material process. Further, population becomes the object of security through a series of self-regulating relations that maintain order through planning for an imagined future—one that accounts for select breaks in future order and verifies select security practices as necessary governance: taking into account “precisely what might happen” (Foucault, 2007, p. 20).

Given that Foucault identifies the milieu as a field of intervention that affects population, it may prove useful to consider possibilities for resistance to contemporary forms of governance within such spaces. Higher education, as a milieu, plays a key role in planning for uncertainty—enactments of preemptive logic. Indeed, to engage with questions of uncertainty means one has to produce effects, things to be managed and tied to the effect of security. Thus it is that Morrissey

(2013) notes that “planning for uncertainty means that populations [and their productions]...must be coded, ascribed value and quantified” (p. 799). This is strikingly apparent in higher education, given the increase in management culture that activates security mechanisms seeking to manifest some desired (and quantifiable) end.

Resistance?

Worthman and Troiano (2016) rightly point to the necessity of locating and operating within spaces in which resistive and productively imaginative work might occur; it is my belief that higher education might be a place for such engagements. Through our relationally-minded scholarship we might intervene simultaneously at the level of daily practices and the layered notion of the *milieu*. Indeed, if it is “a milieu in which we exist and must act in order to be someone” (p. 3), perhaps we have to disrupt such regimes of truth in order to make possible alternative modes of becoming, more disruptive senses of subject-creation. We become with and within the milieu; we change our relational existence even as it changes us. More simply, in order to change the objects we make of ourselves, we need to simultaneously alter the circumstances in which such objects are made known.

What, then, is political action in this moment of intensive dividuation manifesting within Academic Analytics in the milieu of higher education? If, as Lazzarato (2015) notes, the *new collective* is to be found in “data banks, surveys, market studies, and so on” (p. 193)—that is, conglomerations of the *dividual*—how are we to interrupt these normalizing processes? How are we to become less governable given the way in which plugging in to analytics makes possible our/my career arc? Perhaps such interventions might productively extend from a re-orientation to notions of truth.

Of late, there seems to be a bit of political consternation of the meaning of ‘truth’ in our world; what is it? How is it known? To whom (or what) does it speak? As Foucault (1980) aptly noted, “truth is a thing of this world.” The wording here is not accidental and points to more than truth as an historical artifact of context. As a *thing*, of course, truth becomes a dense-entanglement, made up of a series of practices, processes—relations—that establish its contextual recognition. So, how, then, are we to engage with such relations—such *things*—to the extent that they lose their governmental power? That is, how are we to critique or tell-the-truth about things as a disruptive intervention? These are the questions for educational researchers generally and critical scholars of higher education more specifically.

In some ways, I suppose I follow Patricia Cough’s (2010) request for newly developed ways of engaging across methodologies and theories to “address governance while giving freer rein to the indeterminacy of the in-between of the exceptional and the unexceptional ordinary” (p. 641). Given this excavation of reified and more dynamically relational thingification, it makes good sense to turn to the question of resistance. That is, how do these critical orientations of governing make possible select formations of becoming otherwise? What do they make (newly) possible?

To begin, theorists steeped in traditionally neo-Marxist considerations of reification most often work to expose this process of thing-making as inherently alienating and contradictory. Through demystifying the reification process, such critics perhaps hope to reveal cracks in the façade of complete representation—in these critical interstices new modes of being might take form. This form of critique is steeped in the dialectical tradition. On the other hand, those intent on productively engaging with the governance of things from a materially-relational perspective

might engage a more speculative stance that emphasizes the potential for miscalculation, to present possibilities for becoming differently. This is to dwell in the messy space where being (what one is) blurs into becoming (what one incompletely might come to be). Given this, those of us who value the strategic possibilities of research practices in the academy might usefully question how select inquiry practices might make possible disruptive miscalculations; those activities that exceed the bind of normalization.

In the end, Deleuze (1992) famously wrote, “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons” (p. 4). Notice here the call to not be overcome by the affective response (nor to produce the affective as a goal unto itself) but to shift to strategies made possible within such affections. What new weapons are at our disposal? What newly material things might we make possible that escape or exceed normalizing logics of preemption? If higher education is to exist as the government of things, scholars need perpetually new weapons to make possible new formations, miscalculations that make futures newly possible; ends never preordained, becomings never reverted to being.

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