

EDITORIAL

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This volume marks the 100th, and 101st issue of *New Formations* to be published since the journal's inception in the 1980s. It's a fitting way to mark that milestone, featuring as it does, work from scholars based on three continents, working across the disciplines of sociology, social theory, political philosophy, cultural studies, media studies and literature. The theme of the collection is one of the characteristic preoccupations of modern (and 'postmodern') thought in all these fields: the nature and power of bureaucracy. The subject was originally proposed by Eliane Glaser. We would like to thank her for her inspiration, initiative and contribution to the formation of this issue.

One reason for the persistent salience of this topic, in the early twenty-first century, is the apparent contradiction between the anti-bureaucratic rhetoric of neoliberal ideologues, and the evident reality that neoliberal governance has only proliferated the form, power, reach and intrusiveness of bureaucratic mechanisms in many areas of social life. The thought of the early neoliberal thinkers such as Hayek explicitly counterposed itself to the supposed statism and authoritarianism of socialism, social-democracy and 'embedded liberalism'. Much of the popular appeal of the New Right at the end of the 1970s came from its promise to 'free' the people from the overweening, paternalistic authority of the increasingly bureaucratic welfare state. But even as it weakened and dismantled some elements of the apparatus of mid-century social democracy, the neoliberal effort to impose market relations and entrepreneurial ideology across the social sphere could only ever proceed via the proliferation of new mechanisms of surveillance, supervision, reward and punishment. Today, these penetrate the texture of everyday life from the workplace to the social-media platform. Yet still the populist Right in many countries blames 'bureaucrats' for social problems, presenting the very rejection of expertise as some kind of democratic solution.

Several contributions to this volume address this issue directly. Peter Fleming's essay 'Hayek Shrugged: Why bureaucracy didn't die under neoliberalism but boomed instead' sets out to analyse some of the precise mechanisms of neoliberal bureaucracy. Focusing mainly on the writings of Hayek, he argues that economic libertarianism is often contingent on a particular spirit of administration, justification for which can be found in the 'fine print' of Hayek among others. Fleming discusses specific mechanisms of neoliberal bureaucratisation before exploring the implications they have for opposing neoliberal hegemony.

In his article, 'Neoliberal capitalism's bureaucracies of "governance"', Oliver Davis draws on a broad range of relevant recent literature to make a

complementary analysis. His article draws together recent critical work by David Graeber, Wendy Brown, William Davies and Pierre Dardot & Christian Laval, which it repositions in relation to Jacques Rancière's conception of the 'police order'. According to Davis' profound and pioneering analysis, neoliberal bureaucracies reconstruct the world as an array of 'overlapping competitions', with competitive hierarchisation ('ranking') functioning as the key bureaucratic form, or process, in each of these administrative fiefdoms. To this critique he adds a Derridean reflection on the longstanding metaphysical appeal of hierarchy, arguing that bureaucratic organisation is the mundane way in which an anti-democratic commitment to hierarchy becomes naturalised.

Mark Featherstone also draws on Derrida, as well as a range of other thinkers, in his essay, 'Towards a bureaucracy of the body'. This article explores the evolution of what Beatrice Hibou calls 'the bureaucratization of the world', through a cultural history of the idea of bureaucracy in the western canon: taking in readings of Max Weber, Franz Kafka, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault. Following the thought, in particular, of figures such as Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, Featherstone argues that the essential problem of bureaucracy relates to the estrangement of body and writing in a state of modern technological abstraction. While Featherstone is largely concerned with technology (and *techne*) in the most general and abstract sense, his contribution serves as a useful reminder of the perpetual interdependence of political, social, economic and technological processes.

Returning to the theme of neoliberal bureaucracy, a feature of this history that has still received insufficient attention is the deep imbrication of technological with political and economic innovations in the implementation of 'actually existing neoliberalism' since the end of the 1960s (see <https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/new-formation/80-81/what-kind-thing-neoliberalism>). In his contribution to our collection – 'Automated neoliberalism? The digital organisation of markets in technoscientific capitalism' – Kean Birch examines some recent developments in this field, arguing that the entanglement of digital technoscience and capitalism has led to an automated neoliberalism in which markets are configured by digital platforms, personal lives are transformed through the accumulation of personal data, and social relations are automated through algorithms, distributed electronic ledgers, and rating systems. He suggests that two issues arise as a result of these changes: first, are markets being automated away, in that market exchange no longer underpins social organisation? And second, does individual and social reflexivity problematise techno-economic automation, in that new platforms, data assets, ranking algorithms, etc. are all dependent on individuals telling the 'truth'?

In their essay, 'The corporatisation of education: Bureaucracy, boredom, and transformative possibilities', Millicent Churcher and Debra Talbot examine a specific configuration of policy and technology in the

implementation of ‘accountability regimes’ in the education sector. More than one of our contributions is concerned with this issue, from different analytic perspectives: and with good reason. Neoliberal education policy is perhaps the example *par excellence* of an entire sector being subject to repeated and punitive (almost, it often seems, sadistic) bureaucratic regimes by neoliberal ideologues, apparently intent on expunging all modes of relationality and all forms of creativity that cannot be reduced to entrepreneurial logics or retail transactions. Developing another theme that will also be central for more than one of our contributions, Churcher and Talbot consider the affective condition of *boredom* as one that has always been associated with processes and effects of bureaucratisation, asking what it might mean to consider boredom as a deliberate and debilitating consequence of these innovations.

Leon Salter approaches the issue of the bureaucratisation of schooling from a complementary conceptual perspective in his article ‘The paradox of neoliberal education, bureaucracy and hysterical resistance: the case of New Zealand schooling’. Through a case study of the neoliberalisation of New Zealand’s school sector, Salter deploys an analytical framework derived from Lacan’s account of the key ‘four discourses’ of psychoanalysis. His article argues that the discourses of the Master and the University have worked together to sometimes obscure, but at other times highlight, this contradiction, while also showing that educationalists at times adopt the discourse of the Hysteric as a means to publicly highlight this contradiction, contesting the symbolic mandate of the teacher-as-data-node, while avoiding the kinds of full-frontal resistance that might cost them their jobs and jeopardise the education of children.

The theme of boredom returns in Nick Holm’s article ‘Bright grey: The political dialectic of bureaucratic boredom’, but in quite a different register to that characterising Churcher and Talbot’s critique. Holm suggests that bureaucratic boredom might reflect necessary, and even desirable, aspects of democratic political practice. Engaging with fictional texts that have sought to represent this bureaucratic boringness, his article traces how the aesthetic quality of boringness has historically been understood as a means by which bureaucratic systems can facilitate oppressive and anti-democratic forms of politics. However, with reference to recent attempts to automate and streamline contemporary bureaucratic systems, he argues that it does not necessarily follow that the elimination of boringness makes such systems more accessible and responsive. Instead, he suggests that boringness is better understood dialectically as a difficult but potentially necessary part of living together in complex societies.

While Holm, in problematising anti-bureaucracy, ultimately argues for ‘an anti-heroic mode of politics’, Holly Randell-Moon and Arthur J. Randell take us one stage further in the problematisation of anti-bureaucratic assumptions, with their fascinating article: ‘Bureaucracy as politics in action in *Parks and Recreation*’. Randell-Moon and Randell offer a sympathetic and insightful

reading of the popular American TV comedy, which famously presents provincial American municipal bureaucracy as a heroic moral enterprise, self-consciously rejecting neoliberal and libertarian hostility to government. Of course, the show is almost entirely uncritical in its naïve, nostalgic celebration of liberal democracy, but is no less relevant to our concerns in this issue for that. As the authors point out, *Parks and Recreation* assiduously encourages viewers to sympathise with the perspective that bureaucracy is foundational to building inter-organisational relationships and stimulating community activism, while illustrating the role of bureaucracy in place-making and the attendant histories that are included and excluded in the foundation of settler autochthony. Because the ideal of public administration as the service of community is emphasised, *Parks and Recreation* is also able to position the opposite of this ideal – reduction of municipal services and bureaucratic non-caring – as mockable and problematic for community interests, particularly the needs of women and minority groups. As they read it, *Parks and Recreation* highlights how bureaucracy is politics in action that can fundamentally shape the civic, private, and communal spaces of residents' lives.

Perhaps the most influential figure in the study and theory of bureaucracy in recent times, Paul du Gay makes an explicit argument for the indispensability of bureaucracy in his contribution: 'The bureaucratic vocation: state/office/ethics'. This paper shows how and why public bureaucracy has been, and remains, a cornerstone of the modern state and of representative democratic governmental regimes. It does so by highlighting both the constitutive role bureaucratic practices and ethics play in securing civil peace and security, and individual and collective rights and freedoms, for example, and how attempts to transcend, negate, or otherwise 'disappear' bureaucracy can have profound political consequences. Beginning with a brief exploration of some of the tropes of 'bureau-critique' and their historical and contemporary association with key elements of anti-statist thought, it then proceeds to chart how attempts to detach an understanding of bureaucracy from its imbrication in critical polemic and political partisanship can be best pursued by revisiting the work of Max Weber. Du Gay concludes by re-emphasising the enduring significance and political positivity of the ethos of bureaucratic office-holding, not least in the context of the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic.

The problematic status of anti-bureaucratic thought is also a key theme for Janet Newman in her article: 'Living with ambivalence: Bureaucracy, anti-statism and "progressive" politics'. Newman's important work on managerialism and neoliberal forms of governance has been hugely and justifiably influential, and we are delighted to host this contribution from her. Here, she addresses a paradox. Bureaucracy, she argues, can be viewed as an ideological construct mobilised in both the anti-statist rhetoric of neoliberalism, and in discourses of the 'progressive' left. But it is also integral to a range of contemporary calls for the regulation of corporate power, public action and personal conduct. Does left/progressive politics, then, mean

rescuing bureaucracy in a reimagined polity capable of protecting citizens from harm and restoring notions of the state as a guarantor of public rights and justice? Or are left-inclined movements right to critique bureaucratic institutions and search for alternative organisational forms more capable of engaging or even ‘empowering’ citizens? Newman’s paper traces the slips and slides between negative representations of bureaucracy, regulation and the state itself, and asks how far emerging work can offer counter-narratives that serve to reimagine or reclaim them for ‘progressive’ purposes.

Finally, two articles address the crucial question of how bureaucratic modes of government work to reproduce problematic norms across a range of social field. Justin Cruickshank’s article, ‘The expansion of Prevent: on the politics of legibility, opacity and decolonial critique’, goes beyond concern with specifically neoliberal configurations of bureaucratic power, to consider a recent example of UK state policy as exemplifying certain authoritarian features of liberal states in general. Drawing on the idea James Scott and S. Sayyid, Cruickshank examines the ‘Prevent’ scheme: a particular instance of British policy aimed at the containment and neutralisation of ‘Islamic’ terrorism and attendant forms of ‘radicalisation’. Cruickshank argues that efforts by state agencies to render various forms of social and political identity wholly ‘legible’ to it ultimately undermines democratic processes and participation.

Tanya Titchkosky, in her ‘The bureaucratic making of disability’ shows how the Western bureaucratic orientation is particularly troubled by those unable to keep the rules. Disability is, today, a term used to delineate such an inability. Exploring the meaning of bureaucratic definitions of disability can help us learn something about the organising force of bureaucracy on our lives. In particular, her contribution explores a paradox found within the bureaucratic orientation whereby disability is conceptualised as lack of function resulting in an inability to keep the rules that is, nonetheless, managed by the imposition of further rules that need to be kept. Ultimately, her paper tries to reveal what becomes of disability under bureaucratic control, not only to learn something about how bureaucracy works, but also to learn something about how disability is made meaningful.

Altogether this collection of essays makes a significant contribution to the interdisciplinary study of bureaucracy and to the understanding of bureaucracy as a social, cultural, political and aesthetic phenomenon. Featuring rigorous and original critiques of contemporary bureaucratic power alongside subtle and persuasive arguments for the impossibility of democracy without bureaucracy, it testifies to the lasting utility of our commitment to the interdisciplinary and conceptually ambitious study of theory, culture and politics. *New Formation* has now maintained this commitment, actively encouraging such intellectual ambition, for a full 101 issues. We intend to carry on for many years to come.