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Postal Communication and the Making of the British Technostate

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Abstract

Postal Communication and the Making of the British Technostate

I

This paper concerns the nature of the state in regard to the operation of liberal governmentality. It is part of a book in progress on the British state with the working title *The Soul of Leviathan: Making the British Technostate.* The literature that puts the concept of governmentality to empirical work is now considerable, spanning several disciplines[1], and taking an increasingly historical direction[2]. In my own recent book, called *The Rule of Freedom,* I explored how governmental power operated in the city, particularly in Britain but also beyond, including both the generation and what may be called the "reception" of this power[3]. The book deployed the idea of governance working through various rationalities and technologies, themselves based on the deployment of freedom. By their nature these aspects of governance involved an account of agency somewhat at variance with many historical accounts, agency in this post-Foucault reading being seen as multiple, dispersed, and distributed in ways that put at question the idea of a sole or main author of government (for example the state itself). The account also considered a distribution of agency that often involved a transcendence of human volition and consciousness, and indeed human agency at all, given the book's emphasis on the operation of power in material terms.

However, it seems to me that in spite of a certain scepticism I did in practice have frequent recourse to the state as the origin or at least the primary coordinating influence of governmentality. In this essay my attention moves from the city to the state, while retaining freedom and liberalism as abiding concerns. Despite current social science tendencies to concentrate on governmentality and correspondingly to relegate the importance of the state, the significance of the state needs to be re-emphasised. However, in the light of the governmentality literature, the understanding of the state that emerges is clearly different from existing, mainstream ones. It is in fact decidedly more a matter of the state as a coordinating entity, rather than a centre from which power radiates outwards in unilateral fashion.

In the governmentality literature the term government has two meanings, the governance of conduct in general (of the self, the family, the institution and so on). The second sense of governmentality is as a "problematics of rule", when the diverse and dispersed forms of governing conduct at work in this general sense are concerted and combined at higher levels, principally but not solely at the level of the state. The political and the state are here addressed in terms of a variety of rationalities and technologies that extend the concerns of those who would rule upward through a hierarchy of increasingly sophisticated elaborations, and eventually to a territory and its population[4]. The state is therefore a result, not a cause, an outcome or effect of various problematics of rule. This literature is in general fairly reluctant to give the state any more existence than this, and this is where the problem starts, for it is never clearly thought out how the state is now to be understood in the light of this position. A multitude of questions and problems are left unanswered and unsolved. This paper is a small contribution to how this rethinking the state might be possible.

In thinking about the state Corrigan and Sayer's pioneering, and in British terms still somewhat lone, work of over 20 years ago is a useful point of departure[5].

They think of the state as not a thing “out there” (a bureaucratic apparatus, a centralised body of institutions, and so on) but as what they call “regulated forms of social relationships”. As they say, “the enormous power of “the State” is not only external and objective”, it is in “equal measure internal and subjective, it works through us”[6]. They also see that this creation of political subjectivity involves the creation of the legitimacy of the state itself, something in important measure turning upon realising as something inevitable and natural as something that is in fact contingent and humanly created.

Of course, the apparatus of government is real enough, but citing Philip Abrams they note how the state is “an ideological construct, a fiction”, “an ideological artefact attributing unity, structure and independence to the disunited, structureless and dependent workings of the practice of government”[7].As they state, descriptive names, in this case “the state”(something as they say “seemingly neutral, natural, universal and obvious”) are in fact what they call “impositional claims”, that is to say discursive claims on reality. These names therefore hide the actual practice of government. However, the practice of government is in part precisely about creating the “fiction” of the state, a fiction we can think of as that “Mortall God” of Hobbes’ imagination of the state[8]. Legitimacy for the state is secured in terms of a monopoly of force, and a monopoly of forms of knowledge (knowledge about what is governed, and about itself), but it is also secured through a monopoly of what might be called truth, the truth of governing, so that what is a “fiction” becomes in some sense true.

Bourdieu points to this in his work on the state and the state nobility[9]. In his terms, the state produces and imposes "categories of thought" that we spontaneously apply, in the habitus, to all the things of the social world. He writes of the state "as the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: coercive, cultural, informational, economic, symbolic"[10]. This process constitutes the state as the possessor of a sort of meta-capital, which he describes as "statist capital". Essential to this is the claim that "the condition, or at least the correlate, of all the other forms of concentration (of capital) is the concentration of a symbolic capital of recognised authority". This form of symbolic capital is dependent on the state's claim to all "the operations of totalisation (censuses, national accounting) and of objectivization (for example, cartography, the unitary representation of space from above, or writing)"[11]. What Bourdieu points to is the central place of the state bureaucracy in this process of state formation, in concentrating the capital of "recognised authority" through its claims to universality and objectivity, claims intrinsic to what I call the "truth" of the state. Truth is therefore central to the making of the state[12]. He also points to the importance of material aspects, something absent in the Corrigan and Sayer work, at least as a conscious and theoretically elaborated object of study.

What the historical and sociological work cited so far points to therefore is not so much the ontological presence of the state, but the state as an "effect"; in Corrigan and Sayer's reading, an ideological construct attributing unity and autonomy to what they call the "disunited, structureless and dependent workings of the practice of government". This distinction between effect and practice, or practices, is I think especially useful. The idea of the state as an effect is developed with particular force in Timothy Mitchell's work[13]. In turn the distinction between the state as fiction, a construct, or an “effect”, and the practice of government, is a crucial aspect of Mitchell’s work, but in such a way as not to emphasise the achieved unity of the state as the outcome of ideological factors alone, as in Corrigan and Sayer, but as a result of material ones also.

It is Mitchell's development of the idea of the "state effect" that most directly relates theory and practice in this light. He writes of colonial Egypt in the 20th-century. Drawing heavily upon Foucault, he is nonetheless critical of how Foucault speaks of the articulation of power relations in "disciplinary society" without understanding how these are produced (or, how the state effect is produced). Mitchell's emphasis is on how internalisation occurs through the creation of the sense that power is part of an external world, and hence objective, and therefore both real and true. In his view the achievement of legitimacy is a question of *meaning*, of making what is actually mundane and material seem abstract and "non-material", including the state itself as separate from, and above, society. The state/society distinction is therefore a facet of the basic western epistemological distinction between the subject and the object, the material and the non-material, the concrete and the abstract, and so on. The state, in these terms, is seen as a "metaphysical effect" of practices of government and of the social, economic and other circumstances enabling these practices and effects, and so making their end result seem "real". Now, as Mitchell says, this is far from the realm of "ideology" alone. To quote him,

> "A construct like the state occurs not merely as a subjective belief, incorporated in the thinking and action of individuals. It is represented and reproduced in visible, everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking out and policing of frontiers. The cultural forms of the state are an empirical phenomenon, as solid and discernible as a legal structure or a party system. Or rather, I argue, the distinction made between a conceptual realm and an empirical one needs to be placed in question if we are to understand the nature of a phenomenon like the state"[15]

This work is extremely suggestive in showing how the effect of the state works, or perhaps I should say how the effect of the economy appears to work, and to be understood as real. The argument, in its empirical working out in *The Rule Of Experts*, is in fact about the appearance of "the economy" in a modern form, as an autonomous, self-regulating sphere. However, the ways in which he considers how an economy may be formatted is parallel to how the state affect was achieved. And this term "formatting" seems to me to be especially useful, conveying as it does "the style or manner of an agent or a procedure" (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary,* 1995 edition), a form of words avoiding the resonance of terms such as "invention", construction", on the one hand, and the vocabulary of structure, framework and function on the other, terms that reflect the invidious distinction of the material and non-material. In terms of thinking about the state Mitchell considers such factors as the creation of the frontier, as an idea but also, and especially, the technology associated with the modern frontier (barbed wire, passports, latterly all sorts of electronic surveillance). He also points to the appearance of law as a framework superimposed above social practice.

In particular he considers the creation of the epistemological distinctions he regards as so central as themselves being represented by the institution of private property. A central aspect of this, and one relating private property directly to the state effect, through the identification of the state with territory, are western notions of space and time, in particular the idea of space as that which can be enclosed, divided, viewed, classified, mapped, and therefore made governable, whether by property owners in the case of private property, or state officials in the case of state territory. In my earlier work I made increasing use of the idea of "state space", particularly in relation the Ordnance Survey, and in the new work, some of which I shall consider later, I consider how state communications systems such as the British Post Office also made new conceptions of society, state and nation available.

These notions of space, apparent also in Mitchell's earlier book *Colonising Egypt*[16], are indeed tied up with the western idea of order itself, the very *possibility* of an ordered world, intimately involved as this was with the world's objectification. The ordering of space, for example, flattened out particularisms, differences and exceptions, facilitating new notions of difference based on the institution of the normal. It also instituted a removal of the site of knowledge, in the case of the map, from the land itself to the map. This removal was part of the creation of the distinction between reality and representation, in turn developing the notion of *correspondence* between an object world and the subject, an object and its image. Mitchell goes on to speak of a "national economy" as being "formatted," by elements that facilitated the notion that economic relations are homogenous, external, and simple. For instance, the range of geographical environmental, material and technological factors which contribute to the imagining of the density, tangibility, and abstraction necessary so that economic relations, and an economy, especially a national economy, be understood as autonomous and real. Factors such as the production of public institutions for economic knowledge, or the location and character of the Egyptian trade and industry are considered. Many of these aspects were present in the formatting of the modern state, which in turn produced and depended upon the institution of a national economy.

Clearly, the diverse understandings of the state I have considered turn very much on what Mitchell calls "the character of calculability", and on notions of space and time being shaped by the necessity to calculate. State processes were, and are, therefore directly linked to processes of standardisation, themselves dependent on the production of space and time as objective and abstract. In contemporary work on the state, in this case the development of the EU, post-Foucault scholarship is apparent in the important work of Andrew Barry[17], *Political Machines,* which deploys standardisation to argue that technological government follows historically after "territorial government". The European Union develops as a political institution as much by technological as any other means, and this development depends on processes of standardisation, which in turn make possible the creation of what he calls technological zones, operating across national boundaries. "Inter-operability" is created through standardisation, something in fact as often a failure as a success, as Barry shows in detail.

However, Barry is surely wrong in locating technological governance simply in the present and the very recent past, for one can see the emergence of what I would term the technostate much earlier than this. (The "technostate" is to be seen in the same light as the "technosocial" as used in the sociology of scientific knowledge and in actor network theory). This early emergence, alongside the "territorialisation" of the state, in relation to the British case of liberal governance, is a dominant theme of my new, work in progress, book. The technostate created and depended upon what Barry calls the "technoscape", another useful term, like formatting, that I am happy to appropriate. My work on the 19th and 20th-century Post Office involves the ways in which the emerging technostate gave rise to a particular technoscape, by means of which the state and "society" were transformed. For immediate purposes, a "technoscape" can be described as the interpenetration of the human and the nonhuman in a particular technosocial regime, in present terms one shaped by the emerging communications technologies of a new kind of state in the 19th century.

Existing mainstream historical accounts of the British state pay little or no attention to these path-breaking accounts of the technical and technological aspects of state formation. In terms of the debate on the so-called "Victorian revolution in government" of several decades ago, the state is conceived of either as a response to intellectual influences, particularly *laissez-faire* thought, or as a neutral, administrative machine reacting to social and economic problems in terms of pragmatic reform. Either way, the reality of the state is pretty much taken for granted, and there is no theoretical probing of the nature of the state[18]. This seems to be the situation more widely: whether the state is seen as autonomous, as in liberal notions of the state, or as the expression of the power of interests or elites (class, economic, and so on) as in Marxist and other accounts, the state is in one sense or another thought of as what I referred to above as an integrated totality and a unitary agent.

This goes for general historical accounts of the state [19], as in Harling's recent overview of the British state, and for avowed attempts at "rethinking Leviathan"[20]. The latter is the title of an important historical collection concerned with rethinking existing stereotypes of the German and British state formation, but nonetheless, despite its stated intention of moving beyond the traditional Weberian concerns with the study of bureaucracy, law, finances and war, it ends up by concentrating precisely on these topics[21]. And when the term "infrastructural power" is used in the book, it is in a very conventional sense, far removed from the physical and material power of things like drains and markets. In Brewer and Helmuth's collection on Leviathan the term simply applies to the administrative capacity to realise objectives. The book is interested in "practice", but the sense of practice is also removed from the sense of the term applied here. Brewer's seminal *Sinews of Power*, for all its brilliance, is also removed from the considerations I outline.

When the state is written about, in general it tends to be still in terms of its constitutional and administrative manifestations, its social and economic role (welfare, educational and economic policy and practice for instance), the central and local administrative apparatus, or in terms of ideas or experiences of the state. The cultural turn in history has pretty much ignored the state, as indeed it has ignored the economy, at least in Britain, and even in the United States, where the state after the cultural turn has been considered[22], the situation is not greatly different. The working out of the governmentality approach in historical terms, both in metropolitan and colonial, and in European and American arenas[23], has seen the state much more closely considered. Even there, my own work included, the state has relatively infrequently been the object of systematic attention, given the characteristic suspicion in Foucauldian thought.

One moves nearer to a productive interrogation of the utility of the concept of the state in the contributions to a recent symposium on the state coming out of the interdisciplinary field of historical sociology (in the *Journal of Historical Sociology*) [24]. Here materiality and practice are construed more in terms of the "practice of everyday life". In terms of the state, following Weber, it is seen to be a product of forces of standardisation that are involved in the "routinisation of charisma"[25]. The state is rooted in "charisma", and originally this charisma was that of rulers who drew upon divine authority for it. Subsequently charisma is routinised and standardised: in terms of such things as the standardisation of money, and mensuration in general; the standardisation of authority in terms of unified, ranked armies and police forces; but above all, in Clanchy's reading of medieval society[26], in terms of the standardisation writing makes possible.

Of course, in more mainstream accounts of the history of the state, ones very often taken up with the history of ideas, the evolution of the concept of the state can be seen to parallel the effect of these processes of standardisation which I point to, so in fact contributing to the reification of state. This is so particularly in the16th and 17th centuries when the state became separated from both the rulers and the ruled. The state became distinct from the person and the status of the prince, on the one hand, and from the prince's subjects and the territory they inhabited on the other. The republican tradition contributed to the separation of the prince from the state, its inhabitants and territory. The absolutist tradition contributed to the separation of the prince from the ruled. The word "state" emerged to avoid republican connotations, but also that of the idea of the personal role of the prince[27]. However, given the endemic nature of historical specialism , the obvious connections between the history of ideas, the wider history of power, and in particular material dimensions of power, are almost entirely neglected in mainstream, intellectual history of the state.

Even in the symposium to which I have referred there is still a very limited sense of what the technical and a practical might be. As Clanchy sees, the supernatural authority of the state is followed by the post-supernatural authority conferred by "standardisation", but the extent to which these post-supernatural aspects of the state were a product of the material , the practical and the technical is not seen. What an interest in the these aspects might amount to is, as I indicate, especially evident in the field of science studies, and in its various social science applications, above all actor network theory. Mitchell's work, for example, is greatly indebted to these approaches. It would be helpful to explore here a little bit more the theoretical perspectives thrown up by these applications. However, this is beyond the scope of the present paper [28].

The accent on the "routinisation of charisma" through the standardisation of social life takes us back to the question of the truth of governance of course, for it is precisely standardisation that creates the state as a "fiction", and therefore something self-evident, and "naturalised". The theme of "standardisation" is one I have pursued in *The Rule of Freedom,* in terms of dimensions of state knowledge in relation especially to the abstraction and objectification of space itself, something evident in the state's deployment of statistics and maps. In that book I also approached standardisation in another sense, also indebted to science studies, as - to my mind quite brilliantly - has Christopher Otter[29], in particular how the material world (drains, streets, buildings) was made "durable". The conveying of durability to material things so that they would operate in regular, uniform and standard ways was central to the government of things, and so of people. These things carried possibilities for human action and agency that could only be fully realised by means of the creation of material durability.

The understanding of the state that has emerged from science studies, and from actor network theory, may be termed a technosocial one. In *The Rule of Freedom* I employed that term as well as the term technopolitical. In that book I explored the technopolitical in terms of technosocial solutions to political questions that were to be found in the governance of the city, and in particular in the material things and processes apparent in markets, sewers, roads, material objects like maps, and so on. Part of the "political" nature of these solutions lay precisely in the way they were realised as "technical" and so *outside* the political. Pursuing a somewhat different, if related, intellectual track to the one I have, the work of scholars in the field of the historical sociology of material culture is particularly suggestive.

Among others, that of Richard Biernacki and Chandra Mukerji is I think exemplary, the latter on how the power of the French state was engineered into the French landscape in the 17th century, in terms of the "territorialisation" of the state, for example in the fortifications at the periphery and the gardens at the centre of the new French state[30]. She also considers the crucial role of major public works, such as the building of canals, in enacting the material power of the state. Territorialisation also took material form in the dispersal of state power into French products and economic practices, encouraged and developed by the state, so that France became part of the economic landscape itself, the landscape of industrial and rural production in its everyday forms. The point here also is that the French state was discursively constituted and experienced, but experienced too in ways beyond this discursive articulation in terms of practice and material life. One simply lived out the state as part of the practice of everyday life, in what for the sake of brevity can be called habitual, embodied, "prediscursive" action. These dimensions have been greatly absent in many accounts of the state.

They are also present in the work of Patrick Carroll, who uses the term "state country" to describe these dimensions of the state, in distinction to institutional forms as such. I think that term is a useful one, but it seems to me, with its emphasis on land, somewhat more appropriate to pre-liberal forms of governmentality, and perhaps more to pre-industrial forms too. Carroll's great interest in fact is in Ireland, so long a predominantly agricultural and rural nation[31]. Carroll pays particular attention to the massive public works projects that characterised 19th-century Ireland. In particular he considers the engineering projects designed to drain and bring under cultivation the extensive boglands of Ireland, in the process "civilising" the wild Irish landscape, and by extension the wild Irish populace. In *The Rule of Freedom* I entered upon this area of state engineering, if only briefly[32]. In this regard the work of Ken Alder on France is particularly impressive[33]. At something of a tangent to this approach, but complementary also, James Scott's study of how material forms are involved in the knowledge-producing practices of the modern state is also of relevance here[34]. So too are a number of the contributions to my recently edited book, *The Social in Question*[35]. The field is indeed becoming a particularly rich one. In the hope of adding something to it I want to conclude this paper by talking about the emergence and consolidation of what I call the postal state in 19th- and 20th- century Britain.

II

In the new book I consider the state in terms of the category of *communications,* something from at least the early19th century absolutely central to the making of the modern state. I pursue this in terms of the postal state. This is part of making the state *technical.* In thinking about what might have preceded communications and the postal state, the work of Chandra Mukerji on the significance of the *land* in generating truths about governance in pre-liberal, absolutist France is particularly productive. It may be useful therefore, to think about a transition from the land to communications (as well as the liberal city) as a central organising principle of the modern state, as well as a new source of governmental truth. In France land generated truths about the subject of rule in absolutistism, namely the ruler himself or herself, or more precisely the ruler as the state itself, corresponding to Hobbes' understanding of the state as the "mortal God". In Britain the city generated truths about the subject of rule in liberalism, namely the free self, existing in a free society and economy, but above all in the free city itself. However, central to how the city operated, because central to how both freedom and the liberal state operated, was the field of communications.

Now, I am not claiming that land ceased to be of significance, and of course the transition to liberalism was uneven and long drawn out. Still less am I suggesting that the land and territory ceased to be significant in British state formation, obviously not: in fact in a long chapter in *The Rule of Freedom* I looked at the role of state mapping authorities, in Britain the Ordnance Survey, in constituting the modern nation state. The British Ordnance Survey had its roots in the 18th-century, but was really only effective from the early 19th century. Territory was absolutely central to the formation of the state in the 19th-century, and of course to that of the British Empire, although less so to the already territorially integrated United Kingdom than in continental Europe. In the 19th century, and certainly in the UK, one could also say that the city represents a new territorialisation of the state, eclipsing the land, although it is clear that territory and communications developed together, emphatically so in the course of the 19th-century, the one being indispensable for the completion of the other as a means of organising the governance of the state. Nonetheless, these distinctions notwithstanding, in terms of the long-term nature of state formation, a useful contrast can be drawn between Britain and France.

The early formation of the British state was very importantly the product of *English* state formation, in contrast to France. Given the latter's more dispersed geography, with its more various social structure, and less uniform series of local cultures, at least when compared with England, the salience of land in French state building is obvious and unsurprising enough. In the English, or British, case, the formation of Britain in the19th and 20th centuries did of course depend upon configuring British power in terms of territory, and in terms of impressing British rule upon the land. So much is evident in the engineering projects that followed the early 19th century transport revolution in Britain. These were enormously important in cementing *British* state power, and the role of engineers in shaping the land in this way identifies them as politicians *manque*. However, not only had the British state preceded the French in terms of the configuration of territory, and the salience of land - owing to its relative homogeneity - but given its geopolitical role as the island home of an increasingly large empire, communications became central to the rationale of its governance early on, much of continental Europe following the communications route later and in a different fashion.

The emergence of the communications state in Britain can be understood in terms of the postal systems that preceded the 19th century. I should emphasise here that the letter was a key element in developments, the telegraph being limited to business and administrative purposes for much of the 19th-century, also the telephone in its early days. Only after the Second World War did the telephone develop on a mass basis (except of course for the USA). Not that the telegraph, for instance, was not central to state formation, though here the fabrication of the economy was more important (for example, without the telegraph international stock exchanges were unthinkable). From its earliest form the postal network functioned as a facilitator for state power. It enabled the state to govern. For the state in its oldest sense (the state as 'in state', in the institution of Royalty, and the Court as its embodiment in the person of the monarch), to act as a centre of calculation and government it was necessary that it be able to know itself and the regions it desired to govern, and able to communicate its desires to them.

This age-old strategy is at the heart of any system of rule and the postal service was no more than a tool of state power/knowledge until the seventeenth century: a way for the monarchy to observe distant parts of its territory and its minions and simultaneously to communicate its wishes to them and check whether or not they were carried out. The postal service enabled the monarchy to govern over an area that exceeded that possible by direct personal influence (that is personal encounter), or rather it allowed direct personal influence from the monarch, the embodiment of the state, to be extended over great distance and time in the form of official communication. The post enabled the incorporation of the disparate territories and subjects of the kingdom into something like a unit (albeit a fluid one). Thus there is a direct correlation between the state's ability to organise and communicate with itself and its power and extent.

In monopolising long-distance communication the monarch was (generally) able to ensure that his was the most extensive network of power. The rationality was very clearly that no one other had business communicating over distance. In the seventeenth century this rationality altered significantly, for it was at this point the use of the post began to be extended more widely to 'the public'. In 1635 Charles I extended this service to the public, allowing the Royal Mail to carry letters other than Royal communications. This system became more formalised and regularised so as to render it useful to the public. No doubt Charles instituted the Royal Mail in order to generate the revenue Parliament denied him and thus increase his own power and independence. However the Court was to remain the centre of communication, all letters passing through the system having to travel through London. Communication through the post was private, but nonetheless the right was reserved to examine all letters that were seen as potential threats to the security of the state. No post was permitted to be carried on anything other than personal business in the course of a journey. It was essential for the security of the court that any alternative power bases established throughout the kingdom should not be allowed to unite and challenge its authority. Thus the 1635 Act can be seen as a compromise between a desire for revenue, and thus power, and the potential risks produced by general communication. These risks were offset by the continuing mail monopoly. This was clearly a system engineered to provide the sovereign and his court with the greatest possible power and control over his territory and subjects with the minimum of risk[36].

There were several reasons for this development, including the impact of renaissance socio-political theory, which suggested that the public had a right to govern themselves and were constituted as a body separate from the state (as Skinner indicates, this involved the separation of the person of the King from the wider political entity at this time). There was also the desire to augment wealth. This desire was driven by a sense of duty to care for the subjects, by a need to maintain the wealth of the kingdom to ward off hostile foreign states and to enable the growth (or more appositely at this time to prevent the financial decline) of the state itself. In this sense the state, that is the Court in its most restricted sense, was fighting to maintain its position of eminence both within the European political arena and in the domestic arena. Ironically this could best be achieved by generating wealth throughout the kingdom which the King could then tax and thus increase his own resources. The 1660 'Post Office Charter', "An Act Erecting and Establishing a Post-Office", which effectively created the modern institution, saw its purpose as 'the maintenance of mutual Correspondencies' and remarked that "the well ordering whereof is a matter of general concernment and of great advantage, as well for the preservation of Trade and Commerce as otherwise".[37] William Dockwra, advertising his London Penny Post in 1680, began :

> 'There is nothing that tends more to the increase of Trade and Business than a Speedy, Cheap, and safe way of Intelligence, much being obstructed and more retarded in all Places where that is wanting. For as Money, like the Blood in Natural Bodies, gives Life to Trade by its Circulation; so Correspondence like the Vital Spirits, gives it Sense and Motion: and the more that these abound in any Place, the more doth that Place increase in Riches, Strength, and Vigour.'[38]

It will be apparent that London had a penny post some 160 years before its national institution in 1840. In this sense, the city can be seen as the harbinger of the communications state. Penny posts existed in other cities and sizeable towns from early on and by the 1830s there were indeed 295 in Ireland, 81 in Scotland, and 356 in England and Wales, most of them of recent origin. These pioneered a postal system not dependent on distance, weight and number of pages, the conditions of the national post. The degree to which towns and cities were made up of islands of intense communicability in the sea of the state needs to be appreciated : figures for frequency of the delivery in London before1840 ranged up to 8 a day, and these compare favourably with letter delivery in London in 1908, which averaged 12 per day from head offices, starting at 7:15 AM and finishing at 8 PM. Considerably before this one could write a letter from the office in the afternoon saying that one would be home late, and have it delivered well before one arrived home. The situation in other provincial cities was comparable.

However, the limitations to all this still have to be emphasised. In 1840 a Londoner received mail from three separate offices, involving three different organisations, the Penny Post, the Inland Post and the Foreign Post. Islands the cities indeed were, for rates for post *outside* city limits were inordinately expensive. The rate around this time for a single sheet letter was four old pence up to a distance of 50 miles, going up to one shilling for up to 300 miles. A double letter of two sheets cost twice this, and three sheets three times. A single sheet letter to Liverpool from London cost 11 old pence.

Extension of the postal system to "the public" after 1680 was therefore a long drawn out and quite complex process, one I cannot go into now[39]. In comparing the new system of the early 19th-century with what preceded it, I shall move directly to the former. I want to consider first the ways in which the new system was made into a "network" that was increasingly auto-regulative. The following passage is from the most famous of all reformers of the post office, Rowland Hill, the architect of the Penny Post, and the man generally regarded as the founder of the modern postal system (it was written in 1837):

> "It is believed, therefore, that the proposed reform, if undertaken by Government, would not meet with opposition. Its object is not to increase the political power of this or that party, but to benefit all sects in politics and religion; and all classes, from the highest to the lowest. To the rich, as to the less wealthy, it will be acceptable, from the increased facilities it will afford for their correspondence. To the middle classes it will bring relief from oppressive and irritating demands which they pay grudgingly, ... And to the poor it will afford the means of communication with their distant friends and relatives, from which they are at present debarred. It will give increased energy to trade; it will remove innumerable temptations to fraud; and it will be an important step in general education: *the more important, perhaps, because it calls on Government for no factitious aid, for nothing in the shape of encouragement, still less of compulsion; but merely for the removal of an obstacle, created by the law, to that spontaneous education which happily is extending throughout the country,* and which, even the opponents of a national system will agree, ought to be unobstructed in its progress" (my italics).[40]

In order to fully appreciate the meaning, and the novelty, of Hill's understanding of a postal system that would facilitate the spontaneous operation of both the economy and society (for these are preconditions of what Hill calls spontaneous education) it is illuminating to consider the technological changes that enabled this self-regulating network to operate. I shall concentrate here on the Penny Post of 1840, which was a departure of fundamental significance (of at least equal weight was the parallel transport revolution, especially the railways). Letter delivery before 1840 depended on local knowledge and face-to-face contact, in part because delivery was dependent on the payment of costs by the addressee. In creating pre-payment in much more convenient forms than hitherto the postage stamp in its various forms was a key element in taking the previous, and very high, level of human interaction, and human agency, out of the communication system. The system of cheap state postal delivery the stamp facilitated served to link names to addresses and residences in a way which depended on formal and impersonal systems of information (for instance the commercial postal directories that developed so rapidly at this time, and which while specific to each city were published in uniform editions by national concerns). In turn, the Penny Post served to accelerate the numbering of house doors and the fixing of street signs, and of letter boxes, and letter slots in doors (something that also seems to have been Hill's invention)[41].

The Penny Post can therefore on the one hand be understood as conducive to the growth of privacy and the individuation of the subject, enabling the fabrication of a free "society", what I term postal society, as well as a free, postal economy. House and person were attached, increasing individual identity, just as the folded, and literally "enveloped", letter enhanced and protected individual identity and liberty. Siegert describes the Prussian and German postal systems in a very illuminating way in regard to parallel but also obviously different developments there, emphasising a similar movement away from territory as a defining element of the state to the one I have described for Britain[42]. Graduated by distance, weight, and number of pages, in the old system proximity and the centre were emphasised. In the new system distance, the permeability of borders and a new centre-periphery relation of empire became apparent.

There was a move from what he calls the “route” to the “relay”[43]. In the Prussian example, the early 18th century saw the coming of compulsion in both the use of the state post and school attendance, the two always being closely linked. The Prussian authorities were intent on making, as one put it, “every citizen…an individual”[44], so that in constituting a new kind of cognitive subject the postal system enshrined and indeed performed a new sort of civic privacy for the subject. However, this individual did not yet govern itself, as in liberalism, but was part of an intensely governed bio-political “population” (Siegert does not seem fully aware of the distinction here between different sorts of political subjectivity around the figure of the individual).

If on the one hand the individual and privacy were emphasised, on the other the logic of the Penny Post was conducive to the creation of the collective of humans as well. Names were taken out of the context of the locality, circulating in a new sort of "public" arena. The Penny Post can therefore be regarded as a relatively early example of a “liberal” political technology in action. It explicitly emphasised privacy, represented and consolidated a sphere of freely circulating information, but yet for all the emphasis on privacy was openly dependent on transparent procedures, not linked to personal, local, and hidden, forms of knowledge. The cultivation of the self was intimately related to new forms of collective subjectivity, and these became implicated in governance. Perhaps the key dimension of the postal system in this regard was addressability. Individuals came to be known in terms of their addressability. As Siegert puts it, the address was delivered by the letter, rather than the letter being delivered to the address[45]. Eventually the legal definition of the person came to be defined in part in terms of this addressability. To withdraw addressability came to be synonymous with losing civil rights and civil identity. In Britain the quasi-legal term “no fixed abode” denoted a situation where the core of identity itself was put in question.

The history of the postage stamp, which is a crucial part of this new cultivation of the individual and the collective, has an enormous and detailed secondary literature, much of which assumes that the stamp in its modern separate, adhesive form was central to the development of the penny post. In fact, the modern stamp, and other contemporary systems of stamping that were also new at the time, were together only one element, the graduated payment of letter costs irrespective of weight and number of pages being equally important, as will be apparent. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the technology of stamping, however, for a series of concerted and inventive technological innovations were at a practical level quite crucial for the emergence of the postal system as a self-regulating communication system, one making self-regulating communities of users possible (along with the stamp, in a prodigious bout of early-19th century invention, was the technology of the envelope, especially the self-adhesive envelope capable of being folded by machinery, in which the Hill family had a considerable role; and the railway, especially in the form of the travelling post office and its attendant technology).

It was necessary in the technology of the stamp to maintain the following objects in view: convenience of public use, security from forgery, facility for rapid checking, expense of production and circulation of the stamps, all elements that would facilitate a homeostatic system of communication .[46] The desire to protect against forgery was however probably the central motivating factor behind the design of all the stamp systems. The Post Office was still deeply concerned with the protection of its revenue. Even Hill, who wanted the PO to work as a means of facilitating education and communication believed the Penny Post would also increase revenue. The new technologies were open to public competition, one of the most important competition entries being from Benjamin Cheverton, who suggested separate stamps that would be stuck onto letters by a substance rendered glutinous when wetted with the finger : 'The most refined need not scruple to use the tongue, as in wafers [envelopes?]'. [47] He suggested the stamps could be manufactured by stamping repeatedly with a rolling press on a narrow coil of paper, perhaps a mile long. The stamp would be marked with a head of Mercury, to an original design which could be changed every year. Recognition of the features would enable forgeries to be spotted easily.[48] All these features were to be crucial, except for the system of production and the symbol. Rowland Hill and his assistant Henry Cole (who had also been a competitor) were to adjudicate over the entries. To discourage forgers they would establish a system which would entail the use of extensive, costly and delicate machinery. For the printing it was felt a combination of embossing and printing at the same moment in printing would present forgers with the greatest difficulty.

Hill agreed with Mr. Cheverton that 'there is nothing in which minute differences of execution are so readily detected as in a representation of the human face', for which purpose he advised the use of the Queen's head.[49] The patriotic sentiment which might be expected to lie at the heart of the placement of the Queen's head on the stamps was, therefore, only a part of a process designed to prevent fraud. A human face was the most recognisable object and the Queen's probably the most recognisable face[50]. Nonetheless, in adopting the monarch's head on the stamp, then and ever since-alone, unadorned, self-explanatory-there subsequently developed a powerful symbolic meaning, which contributed greatly to the recognisability of the state, and so eventually to its absorption in everyday life.

More importantly, as far as communication in general is concerned, the Penny Post transformed the way the PO was used to communicate. Before the Penny Post the vast majority of letters were, of necessity due to cost, one sheet communications giving short, vital pieces of information (unless the information was so crucial cost was irrelevant and it extended to several sheets). The introduction of the Penny Post had two key implications for communication. First, the penny rate made use of the official post far more attractive. Gregory has shown how extensive the illegal post was before Hill's time.[51] Much of the increase in postage following the introduction of the Penny Post was doubtless due to illegal mail being transferred to the Postal network. This probably benefited the sender as it would doubtless have travelled more quickly and securely through the PO. It also signified the PO gaining more (practical as opposed to official) control over the postal network. Secondly, the charge by weight not sheet and distance meant that longer letters could be written. This in turn enabled greater personal communication and transformed what was written in the letters, something I am now in the process of considering. The opportunity was provided to include new and different information in a letter and this provided the condition of possibility for the letter to move away from the simple communication of vital information towards the meditative and significant forms they assumed in the nineteenth century (though again, illegal letters may have already had these, and certainly the letters of the wealthy).

III

It will be apparent from this brief excursus that the conditions of communication were being transformed. In this process one can see some of the beginnings of how the state fabricated the social, in terms of the auto-regulative system that was the post (alongside, of course, its role in forming other such systems, particularly the economy). The state in this context enabled the performance of the social, so that the very division between state and society was in part a product of the state. In turn, the "truth" of the state can be seen to lie in part in this very separation, in affirming that the state existed above and beyond society as something autonomous and real, just as society existed apart from the state. Therefore, as well as the fabrication or formatting of society, there was a parallel consolidation of the state as a guarantor of a free society, something of course crucial to liberal governance then and since.

Of course, the British state was and has been more than simply this to its citizens, but this liberal dimension has I think been of pretty central importance in its subsequent forms. This position of guarantor, however, depended not only on a projection of distance, but precisely the opposite in many ways, namely the reiteration of presence, of something dependable and firm (present but not overwhelming, illiberal, and arbitrary). The incredible lightness of being of the British state was a state of being nonetheless. And, one should remember that for the mad, the bad, and many of the poor the weight of the state could be crushing. What liberalism could not rule by freedom it ruled by other means. Therefore, in the work in progress I am engaged on I am mapping out some of the ways in which in the postal and other communication forms this combination of lightness and weight was created, in terms precisely of the material and human performance of predictability, reliability and dependability, and in the end, as the outcome of the trust these represented, something taken as both absent and yet ever-present too, in the familiar disappearing act of the state, the British state especially. It should be remembered in this regard that in Britain, until well into the 20th century, the Post Office *was* the state for most people, the most ever-present and largest state institution in the country, alongside the Armed Forces.

The combination of qualities that I speak of were the main ones of general currency, in this case defining what can be thought of as one particular, and very important, "technoscape" of the British state. This term points to what was in one sense an imaginary projection, but equally a material and spatial system in which subjects were located, not necessarily as the work of representation. Achieving the presence that made a lightness of being possible one can remark first that the creation of a system that was homeostatic involved the emergence of abstraction as key, in that in this new system all eventualities had to be catered for in advance: the projection of these eventualities amounted to a sort of abstract system. Further, freedom from the local and the particular, decontextualisation as it were, meant that the lineaments of an abstract "system" were further reinforced. A system that catered for potentially all possibilities in advance was at once the cause and consequent of the vastly increased range of communication possibilities that was now opened up. Of course this change was further consolidated by the telegraph and telecommunications.

Disembedded from concrete experience, the postal system became amenable to standardisation and hence to mechanisation: the "mechanisation" of the stamp, but also a myriad of other devices and inventions, which included new designs for sorting offices, a new shaping of the Post Office staff themselves as a technical instrument, and much else. Systematicity, the making of new sort of "systems" in the way I indicate, in its dependence on abstraction from direct human experience told powerfully in terms of the seeming objectivity of the new "system" in question.

This emergence represented in particular a move from impermanent connectedness to permanent connectedness. Addressability meant that one was now inevitably part of a system of connection. Actual use of the system involved its material embodiment in human practice: permanent connectedness was "taught", by means of all that the new devices of the postal system, an inculcation at work in everyday life which would therefore have contributed to the apparent objectivity and taken-for-grantedness of the new postal system. Just as technical knowledge had in its elaboration become non-social, so something like the reverse also happened, the non-social borrowing back the social as technical knowledge was translated back into practical knowledge and so made seemingly objective through its existence as practice. This process is described by Latour with characteristic brio and insight[52]. One can think here of what he calls "translation devices", devices involved with this switching between the social and the nonsocial. The postbox itself , the mail aperture on the door, the latter perhaps the most fundamental of these little tools of knowledge and power, were a training in "permanent connectedness" and in the new faceless communication. Meaning was performed in use therefore.

Connectedness inevitably involved the leaving of traces also, so that the disciplinary dimensions of connectedness were ever-present, along with the less obvious discipline of learning a system in its use, and therefore realising a technospace in the habitus as well as merely "imagining" the state in conventional terms, the terms so much cultural and social history still deal in. The abstraction that the objectivity of the state depended on was also the abstraction of space and time. Time in particular came to be realised as universal and abstract particularly in terms of the running of the postal system, the standardisation of time in the mid-19th century being a joint product of the new railway system and the new postal system. Siegert dwells very interestingly on the minute time economy of Rowland Hill's reorganisation of both the Post Office and his and his brothers' experimental school (as we have seen, the "pedagogic state" was inseparable from the postal state)[54].

We are here in the new economy of functional equivalence [55] , the epistemological foundations of the abstraction that makes elements uniform and interchangeable, and therefore calculable and manageable, the world of statistics, and of the factory mechanisation that was so much a feature of Hill's time. This is a precursor to the interoperability that Barry describes as so central in the 20th century, in the form of EU standardisation. Hill invented a variation of the Universal Time Machine, alongside Babbage's Universal Calculating Machine and Bentham's Universal Disciplinary Machine (Babbage was indeed closely involved with the Hill's activities, as was Bentham)[56].

If the abstraction and disembedded quality of the new system of permanent connectedness that was the Post Office goes some way to explain the lightness of being of the state, so that its naturalisation is in some part explained by an objectivity that was abstract in form, the learning of the system in use and practice go somewhere to account for its firmness and solidity as well. This aspect can be further pursued in terms of the realisation of a technology of trust in terms that produced the post office as predictable and reliable. Trust was performed in action, the action of trusting in the use of the postbox for example, a receptacle often lone and isolated, and seemingly unprotected from theft, vandalism and the elements. There is indeed an interesting technology to the postbox, involved in creating an internal design obviating interference in the mail, so that security became a technical, material matter. Trust, and therefore the embedding of the state in the routines of everyday life, involved the operations of the postmen, of the post office and postbox, of the schedule of collection and delivery, of the stamp and the envelope, and of much else.

However, it is necessary to emphasise very strongly that trust might be misplaced, connectedness disrupted, and the whole process of naturalisation put in question. Systems broke down, failures occurred, and inefficiencies were apparent, and this is also part of the story, a vital part, which receives its proper emphasis in the completed book. The continuous struggle to maintain increasingly complex systems, particularly the imparting to them of "durability" (especially as self-maintaining systems) has been described in the work of Christopher Otter, as mentioned above, in particular his description of how liberalism was made materially durable[57]. However, as a general judgment, the British postal system served its mass constituency well.

Embedded in things and practices the post system became in time the object of a certain veneration, as something inherently British, efficient (for the most part), unobtrusive and yet dependable, the ideal vehicle to represent the rights and liberties of the freeborn British (but especially English) letter writer . The latter figure can be viewed alongside the freeborn British pedestrian, an account of which I give in *The Rule of Freedom*. This veneration was evident in the range of representations of the Post Office, an aspect I am unable to develop here, though it can be remarked that these involved not only representations of the state, but also the nation, and especially the British people, so that the demotic and populist elements were very marked. In the actual use of the post, though decidedly not in its conscious political projection, there were considerable class differences, for a good part of the 19th century working-class people for the most part being outside the postal system, though the postcard was an important exception (nonetheless, the enormous increase in popular literacy in the 19th century prepared for the inclusion of the mass when this came). Use therefore shaded imperceptibly into discourse and representation, the trust of and in things being transformed into these kinds of representation. This was so in terms of ideas of liberty and freedom as well, which as *The Rule of Freedom* indicated had a close relation to the design, operation and experience of self-operating system of various sorts.

As Andrew Barry has observed, communications networks came to provide "a perfect material base for liberal government". As he says, "They are pervasive and yet do not possess a centre. They appear to increase the density of contacts within society without any unnecessary intervention by the state. They have made possible the reconfiguration of territorial space in a manner compatible with the requirements of liberal rule"[58]. Therefore, the postal system, as the fabrication of a social which involved mobility and the possibility of many views and perspectives, can be understood as a realisation of liberal governance in material form (we have seen in Hill of course a manifestly self-aware liberal design at work). As a system of free communication, the postal system was part of the great contemporary emphasis on free circulation. It posited a free and mobile subject, someone who could write on the move, whether one was a businessman or a worker, responding to the ups and downs of the new economic system of free circulation. The postal system produced a citizenry whose mobility also involved the circulation of "intelligence" - the relationship of the post to the circulation of newspapers was very close at the time - so that the postal citizen was one who might have multiple points of view based on multiple sources of knowledge and information. Much contemporary understanding of the city, as well as the material organisation of its infrastructure, was predicated on a social imaginary linked very much to free circulation.

In conclusion, this interest in communications is just one of two aspects of the book I am engaged upon, an account as it were of the efficient as opposed to the dignified part of the constitution, to employ Bagehot's terms. Rationalisation, and abstraction, objectification and the production of a kind of truth in these terms is parallel to, in fact the other side of the coin of, another sort of power, that of tradition, continuity and what might be termed less the rational than the irrational parts of the polity (or the dignified part of the constitution). Besides the postal state my current work is equally involved with considerations on the civil service, the public schools and the Oxbridge college. These were institutions which produced another sort of truth, the truth of the governors. I am interested in how those who governed sought to govern themselves, to convince themselves of the truth of what they were doing, so that they could do it to others. By looking at these two rather different aspects, connected in so many surprising ways, I am attempting to explore the nature of the British state, and indeed British culture and politics, in terms of the Janus face of Britain, and the highly peculiar nature of its liberal modernity.

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[1] In this literature see for example Thomas Osborne, Andrew Barry, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Rationalities of Government* (UCL Press, 1996); Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self* (Free Association Books, 1999, second edition); *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality* (Sage, 1999); Colin Gordon, Peter Miller and Graham Burchill (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Mike Gane and Terry Johnson (eds.), *Foucault's New Domains* (Routledge, 1993).

[2] For some of these historical applications see Alan Hunt, Governing *Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge University Press,1999); Matthew G. Hanna, *Governmentality and the Mastery of Territory in 19th Century America* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (California University Press, 1999) ; Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton University Press 2001); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum, and Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (Routledge, 2004). See also the

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forthcoming work of Christopher Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (University of Chicago Press , 2008): and James Vernon, "The Ethics of Hunger and the Assembly of Society :The Techno-Politics of the School Meal in Modern Britain", *American Historical Review,* 2005 and *Modernity's Hunger: How Imperial Britain Created and Failed to Solve the Problem of Hunger in the Modern World* (Harvard University Press, 2007). See also the work of Tom Crook, Francis Dodsworth, and Christopher Otter, among others, in the journal *Cultural Studies*, 2007, special issue, "Liberalism, Government and Culture", edited and with an introduction by Tony Bennett, Francis Dodsworth, and Patrick Joyce; and the work of this group in Francis Dodsworth (ed.), *Assembling the Liberal Subject* (forthcoming, Routledge 2008).

[3] Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (Verso, 2003)

[4] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, p 5

[5] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Basil Blackwell, 1985)

[6] Corrigan and Sayer, *The Great Arch,* p. 185

[7] *The Great Arch,* p. 7, and Philip Abrams, "Notes on the difficulty of studying the state", BSA annual conference paper, 1977

[8] See the discussion of sovereignty and Hobbes by Foucault, in which Foucault inveighs against juridical understandings of sovereignty, power and the state: Michel Foucault, "Lecture Two, 14 January 1976" in eds. Mauro Bertani, *et al, Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76* (Penguin, 2003), p 29 especially

[9] Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the state: genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field", *Practical Reason :On the Theory Of Action* (Stanford Univ. Press 1995), and *The State Nobility: elite schools in the field power* (Polity Press, 1996)

[10] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, p 46

[11] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, p 47

[12] However, what this perspective of Bourdieu amounts to is rather unclear-the centrality of claims to legitimacy and "truth" in the making of the state is clearly recognised, but at the same time the state itself seems to have a sort of internal logic and a prescience of its own. Indeed, Bourdieu is often criticised for not having a theory of the state.

[13] Timothy Mitchell, Timothy Mitchell, *The Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (California University Press, 2002).

[15] Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect" in George Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Cornell University Press, 1999)

[16] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (University of California Press, 1991)

[17] Andrew Barry, *Political machines : governing a technological society* (Athlone, 2001)

[18] On the development of the British state from this conventional angle: Pat Thane**,** "Government and society in England and Wales 1750-1914", and Jose Harris, "Society and state in 20th-century Britain" in FML Thomson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Great Britain 1750-1950*, vols3 and 1(1990); P Harling, *The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction (*Polity Press, 2001*)*; K. Theodore Hoppen, *The New Oxford History of England: The Mid-Victorian Generation*, "The nature of the state" (pp 91-127), from part 1 "Society and State", and see the excellent bibliography of Hoppen, including citations to see "Victorian revolution in government" debate. The most interesting long-term account of the British state, beside Derek Sayer and P Corrigan, *The Great Arch,* is John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Unwin Hyman, 1989). On the development of governmental expertise see: Roy MacLeod (ed.),*Government and Expertise: Specialists, Administrators and Professionals 1860-1919* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Gillian Sutherland (ed.), *Studies in the Growth of Government in the Nineteenth Century* (Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1972)

[19] For example, P Harling, *The Modern British State: An Historical Introduction* (Polity 2001)

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[20] Brewer and Hellmuth (eds.), *Rethinking Leviathan: The Eighteenth Century State in Britain and Germany* (Oxford University Press 1999)

[21] John Brewer, Introduction to *Rethinking Leviathan*

[22] George Steinmetz, *Culture/state: the state after the linguistic turn* (Cornell University Press, 1999)

[23] Hunt, Prakash, Dirks, Hannah, also Otter, Dodsworth, as well as Joyce, cited above.

[24] *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 15:1, March 2002, Special number on the state, Steve Hindle, "When and what was the state? Some introductory comments"

[25] *Ibid.,* the traditional and for the most part unquestioning debt to Weber is once again apparent in the collection.

[26] *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Michael Clanchy, "Does writing construct the state?"

[27] Quentin Skinner, "From the state of princes to the person of the state" in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume II-Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) .See also Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies : a Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, 1957).

[28] For discussion of these perspectives, and empirical exemplifications, see Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, (eds.), *Material Powers: Essays beyond Cultural Materialism (*Routledge, forthcoming), One particular conjunction of theoretical influences that I have found especially helpful is the combination of science studies, actor network theory, and the historical sociology of material culture. In John Law's account of modernity, for example, the social is also performed by material things, so that labelling one thing a person and one a machine, one thing material and one thing not, is not given in the order of things but is itself a product of the complex processes of the ordering of people and things which themselves in total make up what "social ordering" is. So too is the underlying distinction between nature and culture or "society", also the human and the non-human. Law here draws on the work of his colleague Bruno Latour who locates this arbitrary division of the world historically in terms of modernity itself. The importance of the work of Bruno Latour should be emphasised, but also recent rethinking of the nature of society and the social. From these perspectives, and particularly in terms of Latour's radical rereading of the distinction between the social and the natural, society is not a real entity prior to an independent of that which constitutes it. In this view "society" is seen to be radically contingent, not necessary, this sense forming a marked apprehension of the delicacy, difficulty and complexity of achieving order. The ordering that makes up "society" is comprised of delicate filigrees of "actors" and "networks", comprising the non-human as well as the human. John Law, *Organising Modernity*.

The general idea is that agency does not lie outside the actors and networks in which it is located (say in "society" or "nature"), but that actors contribute the characteristics and distribute the properties that make up the social. In this post-social social, as it were, there is nothing (again, society or nature) in which networks are embedded. The social and society are seen in terms of the "path building "order making" of the networks and the actants-the latter being a word better than actors in describing and the nonhuman as well as the human elements. The job of analysis, and the moral of this metaphysical story, is that one follows the actants and the networks themselves and in particular those that become "strategic" because of the number of connections they make possible in a highly contingent world.

In this area see Bruno Latour, *Assembling the Social* (Oxford University Press, 2006*)*. Also, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvester Press, 1993). In turn, in his *We Have Never Been Modern,* Latour is heavily indebted to a classical work in the history of science and technology, namely Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1985).); and see also Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Harvard University Press,); "When things strike back: a possible contribution of "science studies" to the social sciences", in *British Journal of Sociology,* 51: 1, 2001, and "Gabriel Tarde and the end of the social", in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History in the Social Sciences (Routledge, 2002).* And see also the anniversary issue of the British *Sociological Review*, 2008, forthcoming, "Sociology and its encryption devices: from causality to description", editorial introduction by Tom Osborne, Mike Savage, and Nikolas Rose.

[29] Christopher Otter, , "Making liberalism durable: vision and civility in the late Victorian city", in *Social History*, volume 27:1, Jan.2002, and "Cleaning and Clarifying: Technology and Perception in 19th-century London", *Journal of British Studies*, 43:1, January 2004. See also the forthcoming work of Christopher Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (University of Chicago Press , 2008)

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[30] Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and The Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge University Press 1997), also *New Rome, Old Gaul: Technology and Politics on the Canal Du Midi* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming)

[31] Patrick Carroll, *The Science/State Plexus: Engineering Culture and Modern State Formation 1650-1900* (University of California Press, 2007)

[32] Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, chapter 2

[33] Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815* (Princeton University Press, 1997); and "Making Things the Same: Representation, Tolerance and the end of the Ancien Regime in France", *Social Studies of Science,* 28:4, 1998 See also Richard Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labour: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (California University Press, 1995) ; "Work and Culture in the Reception of Class Ideologies", in John R. Hall (ed.), *Re-Working-class* (Cornell University Press, 1997) and his *Time, Place, and Action: Ventures beyond the Cultural Turn* (forthcoming).

[34] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition* (Yale University Press, 1998),

[35] Richard Biernacki and Jennifer Jordan, "The place of space in the study of the social", and Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, "The spaces of clock times" in Patrick Joyce (ed.), *The Social in Question*

[36] For the basic history of the British Post Office see Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: A History* (Princeton University press, 1948) and M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840* (Athlone Press, 1985)

[37] *Journal of the House of Commons* VIII, Appendix: 175 (12 Carl. II cap. XXXV, *An Act Erecting and Establishing a Post-Office*)

[38] Anon. [William Dockwra], *A Penny Well Bestowed, Or a Brief Account of the New Design contrived for the great increase of Trade, and Ease of Correspondence, to the great Advantage of the Inhabitants of all sorts, by Conveying of LETTERS or PACQUETS under a Pound Weight, to and from all parts within the Cities of London and Westminster; and the Out Parishes within the Weekly Bills of Mortality, For One Penny* (London: Thomas James, 1680)

[39] For the pre-reform postal system see C. Calvert, *A History of The Manchester Post Office, 1625-1900* (Manchester: J. E. Lee, 1967) ; C. J. Cooke, *Irish Postal History: Sixteenth Century to 1935* (London: Morrison and Gibb, 1935) ; M. Reynolds*, A History of the Irish Post Office* (Dublin: MacDonnell and Whyte Ltd, 1983) *;* K. Ellis*, The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Administrative History* (OUP, 1958) ; Gardiner*, A Generall Survey of the Post Office, with severall Useful Remarques to The particulars of it Most humbly presented To his Royal Highness James Duke of Yorke* (1677); J. W. A Lowder*, A Postal History of London, 1635-1960 ;* H. Robinson*, Britain's Post Office: A History of Development from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (OUP, 1952) ; C. Roeder, *Beginnings of the Manchester Post Office* (Manchester: Richard Gill, 1905) ; T. Todd, *William Dockwra and the Rest of the Undertakers: the Story of the London Penny Post, 1680-82* (Edinburgh: Cousland and Sons, 1952); R. Hill, *Post Office Reform; its Importance and Practicability*, 2nd ed. (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1837) ; R. C. Tombs, *The King's Post: Being a volume of historical facts relating to the Posts, Mail Coaches, Coach Roads, and Railway Mail Services of and connected with the Ancient City of Bristol from 1580 to the present time* (Bristol: W.C. Hemmons,1905) ; E.Watson*, The Royal Mail to Ireland: or and Account of the Origin and Development of the Post Between London and Ireland through Holyhead, and the Use of the Line of Communication by Travellers* (London: Edward Arnold, 1917)

[40] Rowland Hill: *Post Office Reform; Its Importance and Practicability*, second edition (London 1837), pp 66-7

[41] Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, chap 1

[42] Bernhard Siegert, *Relays,: Literature as an Epoque of the Postal System* (Stanford University Press, 1999)

[43] *Ibid*., chaps 6,7

[44] *Ibid.,* chap 11

[45] Siegert, chap 12, "The standards of writing"

[46] D. N. Muir, *Postal Reform & the Penny Black: A New Appreciation*, (London: National Postal Museum, 1990), p. 79

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[47] D. N. Muir, *Postal Reform*, p. 87

[48] Muir, *Postal Reform*, p. 87

[49] Muir, *Postal Reform*, p. 97

[50] In the event, the plans adopted were not those of any one suggestion, but a combination of several. The public were to have several alternative options: stamped covers, stamped envelopes, adhesive stamps and stamps to be struck on paper of any description. The stamp was to be applied by the PO to any paper brought in by the public, although this idea was not actually introduced until 1855 because of problems making the stamp proof against forgery. In the end the adhesive stamp emerged as the most convenient and widely used form of stamping, and by May of 1841 five presses were at work for a week printing 600,000 stamps a day. By the end of January 1841 68 million Penny Blacks had been printed. That 68 million stamps were printed demonstrates the instant popularity of the Penny stamp. However, this whole process underlines the contingency of the adhesive stamp in the process of the Penny Post and if we are to identify its key features this was not the only one. The Penny Black was convenient and popular, but not the only method which made a penny post possible.

As such it seems that of equal importance was the change to charge by flat rate dependent upon weight, the system already in use on the continent. English letters seem generally to have been sealed sheets, and thus charged double rate for the extra paper while foreign letters were usually contained in an envelope. The envelope charged by weight, not sheet number, facilitating multiple sheets and therefore long letters. This important innovation also depended upon new technology, in this case a technology of more exact measurement. Rowland Hill attempted to implement production of a new weighing machine designed by his brother Edwin. De Grave , the manufacturer, eventually consented to make the Hill's new machine. Rowland Hill noted 'I recommend that all the weighing machines should be so constructed as that the balance should not descend unless the weight of the letter exceeded the exact legal amount by ten grains, so as to prevent disputes arising out of the inaccuracy of the ordinary scales & weights.' The creation of accurate machinery was essential to the operation of a successful charge by weight, for it was necessary that the public should not attempt to reclaim their money by alleging incorrect measurements. This would render the whole system inoperable. Hill managed to get 11 of Edwin's machines made. However, these were not the only machines and a considerable trade grew out of this shift. Some enterprising merchants not only made weights for the post office, but sold them for public use so merchants and others so that they could weigh their letters before sending them. (Muir,74,75,105, 141, 144, 159-60; POST 100/1, *Rowland Hill's Private Journal*, vol 1, 1839-41, p 35)

[51] See D. Gregory, 'The friction of distance? Information Circulation and the Mails in Eighteenth Century England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13, 1987

[52] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope,* chap 6, "A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans: Following Daedalus's Labyrinth"

[54] B. Siegert, *Relays,* chapter 11, " Postage One Penny: Rowland Hill's Post Office Reform"

[55] Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864* (Chicago University Press, 1995); *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago University Press, 1998); also see Steven Shapin , *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago University Press, 1994)

[56] B. Siegert, pp 122-128 Otter, "Making liberalism durable: vision and civility in the late Victorian city", in *Social History*, volume 27:1, Jan.2002.

[57] Christopher Otter, "Making liberalism durable: vision and civility in the late Victorian city", in *Social History*, volume 27:1, Jan.2002.

[58] Andrew Barry, "Lines of communication and spaces of rule " in Rose *et al*, *Foucault and Political Reason*, pp 123-4