Surveying the Social: Techniques, Practices, Power

BRUCE CURTIS*

The varying senses in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century social thought and policy constructed and came to grips with "the social' and "society" are discussed. Social history and historical sociology both need these concepts and need to be critical of them.

Il est ici question des diverses façons dont la pensée et la politique sociales des dix-neuvième et vingtième siècles ont construit et appréhendé le « social » et la « société ». L'histoire sociale et la sociologie historique ont toutes deux besoin de ces concepts et doivent demeurer critiques à leur égard.

"THE SOCIAL", which forms the object of the essays in this collection, has had a curious and curiously truncated career over the last three decades. We learned about its "invention", "genesis", and "rise" in the Foucauldian literature of the 1970s and 1980s. In the early parts of the following decade, it was "written", "governed", "mapped", "played", "undone", and separated from "the self".[1] It seemed to be about to go forth and multiply in the 1990s, yet there are now increasing suggestions that the social is dying, or is dead, or never was in the first place. Such a state of affairs is seen as a source of angst, optimism, or political danger depending upon who is writing and upon just

* Bruce Curtis is professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. He offers special thanks to Paula Maurutto and Dominique Marshall for their contributions to the preparation of this collection.

1 Curiously neglected in this recent literature is Hannah Arendt, "The Rise of the Social", *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), pp. 38–49; see also Bruce Curtis, "Mapping the Social: Jacob Keefer's Educational Tour, 1845", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1993), pp. 51–68; Gilles Deleuze, "Foreword: The Rise of the Social" in Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), pp. ix–xvii; Jacques Donzelot, *L'invention du social : essai sur le déclin des passions politiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1984) and "The Promotion of the Social", *Economy and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1988), pp. 395–427; Ann Game, *Undoing the Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Dorothy Smith, *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

what "the social" is held to mean and to do. Historians and sociologists ponder the question of the forms which might be taken by a post-social history and a sociology after society.

The essays in this collection contribute to such reflection by examining aspects of the historical development of the social. Drawing on a range of conceptual resources, our histories are meant to reveal some of the processes and practices of construction that sustain modern claims to know things about the world and to know to intervene in it. We treat "the social" as both fact and artefact. It is an artefact of the ways of knowing and administering human relations characteristic of what comes to be called the "social science". Its factual character is evident as such ways of knowing and administering realized in investigative instruments, in techniques of representation, and in the policies and practices of public and private governmental agencies. The social is a relational and mobile political form. It usually operates silently in the background of the writing of history and sociology, but, as Denise Riley aptly remarked, "once the seemingly neutral and vacant backdrop of 'the social' presents itself for scrutiny, it appears as a strange phenomenon in its own right."[2]

The ongoing intellectual hubub about the social has taken place without the object in question even registering as a substantive in linguistic usage, beyond the confines of a narrow segment of the academy. Lodged in a list that opens with "sociable" and ends with "sociometry" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "social" works as a remarkably pliable and congenial adjective. In addition to its connections with history and science, "social" happily modifies and specifies "contract", "credit", "democrat", "disease" (venereal), "evil" (prostitution), "order", "realism", "security", "service", and "worker". The *OED* does offer "social climber" and "social secretary", which hint at a substantive — something one could surmount or organize. But the dictionary quickly forecloses such a line of investigation by defining social phenomena in terms of either "society" or "the state". "Social services" are "state-provided welfare services" and "social climbers" attempt to ascend society's ranks. While "the state" is defined as an organized political community, "society" is either a "social mode of life" (in a "civilized nation" and thus, by implication, life under a state) or a "social community". Society is social, social is society, and both seem somehow to be subsumed to the state as an organized political community.

Elliptical meanings and self-referential concepts can be seen to indicate areas of theoretical confusion, of the taken-for-granted (try writing your history or sociology without invoking the adjective "social"!), or of the ideological in epistemological usage. The contributors to this collection propose that some clarification of such ellipsis and self-referentiality can be found by investigating the concrete historical practices of knowledge production and administration — the techniques, routines, rituals, and instruments — that

2 Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 49.

sustain political claims to know something and that underpin capacities for practical intervention. We see "the social" as a product of practices, conflicts, and struggles which encouraged the emergence and solidification of a domain of knowledge, of a field for the exercise of power, and of an object of political administration. The social, however, is mobile, and topographical imagery in relation to it is potentially misleading.

The artefactual character of the social — that it is a product of projects, practices, and techniques which equate and unify empirically disparate objects and relations — in no way prevents it from being an object of human activity. Yet there is no essential thing that is the social. Its objective character results from the ongoing work that is done to objectify it; we investigate some of that work here. As Riley put it eloquently:

> The nineteenth-century "social" is the reiterated sum of progressive philanthropies, theories of class, of poverty, of degeneration; studies of the domestic lives of workers, their housing, hygiene, morality, mortality; of their exploitation, or their need for protection, as this bore on their family lives too. It is a blurred ground between the old public and private, voiced as a field for intervention, love, and reform by socialists, conservatives, radicals, liberals, and feminists in their different and conjoined ways.[3]

As the quotation suggests, there are many possible histories of the social that could be written and, in fact, in contemporary discussion, "the social" is invoked to refer to rather different things. By way of introduction to our collection, I flag a number of important and, to some extent, overlapping lines of enquiry. One of these concerns the preoccupation of Foucauldian writers with "the social" as an instrument of governmentality. Here, debate about the social emerged out of reflection on the origins and fate of the welfare state. The history of this social concerns the undermining of a liberal diagram of power, and the programmes associated with it, through the construction of solidarities by administrative means. In turn, Nikolas Rose's speculations on the "death of the social" or Mitchell Dean's discussion of "the end of society" might seem to refer to the displacement of government through solidarity by other techniques and finalities. Insurance technologies, for instance, which based solidarities on an equalization of risks, are seen to retreat in some sectors before "prudentialism", under which individuals are made responsible for their own risk factors. Administrative policies more generally may cease to be justified in terms of the "good of society" or the "public interest". Instead, such individualizing justifications as "efficiency", "competitiveness", or "freedom" may be invoked.[4]

3 *Ibid.*, p. 49; see also Paul Hirst, "The Genesis of the Social", *Politics and Power*, vol. 3 (1981).

4 Mitchell Dean, "Sociology After Society" in David Owen, ed., *Sociology After Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 205–228; François Ewald, *L'État providence* (Paris: Grasset, 1986); Pat O'Malley, "Risk and Responsibility"in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, eds., *Foucault*

A second and overlapping line of enquiry also sees the social as a domain or field, usually within the confines of "the nation". But literatures concerned with the history of the "social science", of statistics, and of political administration emphasize the ways in which "the social" issues from a productive spiral of direct organization, classification, observation, recording, theoretical abstraction, and intervention (not necessarily in that order). A history of this social focuses on practices of observation that produce new objects of knowledge, "things which hold together", such as rates of crime or divorce or insanity or poverty.[5] It attends to the techniques of representation, especially numerical and statistical techniques, that make it possible to abstract regularities from hopelessly complex and variegated empirical contexts — or to posit the existence of such regularities. The potential here is for the discovery of effects of structure, although, as Mary Poovey has remarked, the work of abstraction may be more or less "gestural". Numerical and related techniques of representation have sustained claims to scientific authority, even when numbers and tables have been used in a decorative fashion.[6]

There are common infrastructural conditions for the execution of the large-scale, more or less systematic observations, which are at the root of the social science, as for the administration of the welfare state. Social scientific development and state administration are closely linked, which is not to say they are identical. Still, for theoretical appropriation as for practical administration, empirical individuals, potentially infinite in their variation, must be rendered equivalent, at least within relevant categories and classes. They must also be situated, located, and identified — not least for the mundane reason that the determination of entitlements, the delivery of services, and the levying of sanctions demand it.[7] Rendering human subjects equivalent and making such constructed equivalence a grounds for the determination of life chances is commonly an expression of state sovereignty, of greater or lesser legal, military, fiscal, and political coercion. Social science and state administration both involve identifying practices. A corollary has been that

---

and Political Reason (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp. 189–207; Nikolas Rose, "The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government", *Economy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1996), pp. 327–356, and *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

5 Alain Desrosières, "Discuter l'indiscutable. Raison statistique et espace public" in Alain Cottereau and Paul Ladrière, eds., *Pouvoir et légitimité : figures de l'espace public* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1992), pp. 131–154; "How to Make Things Which Hold Together: Social Science, Statistics and the State" in P. Wagner, B. Wittrock, and R. Whitley, eds., *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Science Disciplines* (Dordrecht, 1991), pp. 195–218; and "Histoire de formes : statistiques et sciences sociales avant 1940", *Revue française de sociologie*, vol. 26 (1985), pp. 277–310.

6 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

7 Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

debates over "the social" have also tended to be debates about the state, although we do not take these up here.[8]

Finally, I point briefly to some work of the last two decades which aims to deconstruct the social and society as the ground upon which the social sciences in general and sociology in particular claim to base explanations. Those involved in this work often describe themselves as promoting a "materialist semiotics"; some of them are situated in the burgeoning field of "science studies". Generally speaking, such work attempts to take on board the proposition that representational practices intermingle in effective ways with objects of representation. Deconstructionist work and science studies have dealt what may prove to be a lethal blow to another way of conceiving of the social: the view that treats it essentially as a domain of human meaning, in contradistinction to a non-human sphere of nature. In much earlier theoretical work in sociology (consider both Talcott Parsons and Max Weber, for instance), social phenomena are by definition those concerned with meaning. Such sociology posits a more or less sharp divide between the variety of culture and the supposed invariance of nature, or between cultural understandings and material relations. A similar set of binaries also characterizes much "social" history, including varieties of cultural Marxism that seek to juxtapose objective material conditions with the contingent, meaning-giving experience of them by social classes. Science studies make a strong argument for the co-constitution of society and nature, and other recent work attempts to overcome the subject/object divide implicit in defining the social as the meaningful. Yet deconstructionist work risks foreclosing an analysis of effects of structure.

8 For some relevant material, see Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1988), pp. 58–89; C. A. Bayly, *Empire & Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); R. W. Connell, "The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics", *Theory and Society*, vol. 19 (1990), pp. 507–544; Bruce Curtis, "Taking the State Back Out: Rose and Miller on Political Power", *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 4 (1995), pp. 575–597; Mitchell Dean, " 'A Social Structure of Many Souls': Moral Regulation, Government, and Self-Formation", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1994), pp. 145–168; Bob Jessop, "Narrating the Future of the National Economy and the National State: Remarks on Remapping Regulation and Reinventing Governance" in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 378–405; Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy and the State Effect" in Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture*, pp. 76–97; Mark Neocleous, *Administering Civil Society: Towards a Theory of State Power* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Slyvana Patriarca, "Statistical Nation Building and the Consolidation of Regions in Italy", *Social Science History*, vol. 18 (1994), pp. 359–376; N. Rose and P. Miller, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government", *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1992), pp. 173–205; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). It is also worth noticing Bourdieu's observation that critical analysis of the state faces the challenge of trying to think about the state outside the categories of thought established through state practices. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field" in Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture*, pp. 53–75.

I outline some dimensions of these approaches to the social in what follows. My aim is not to be either exhaustive or definitive, but rather to share some of the lines of enquiry that may make it easier for readers to engage with the essays in our collection.

Two especially influential works in the Foucauldian literature on the social have been Jacques Donzelot's (selectively translated) *L'invention du social. Essai sur le déclin des passions politiques* (1984) and the more ambitious *L'État providence* (1986) by François Ewald. As his subtitle suggests, Donzelot's work was preoccupied with explaining how the achievements of the postwar welfare state in France undermined the very political energies and imagination that presided at their creation. His account of the "invention" of the social has attracted relatively little attention in the English-language literature, which has been more interested in his discussion of how notions like "society" and "the social" were subsequently mobilized in discursive practice.

Donzelot claimed the social was invented to resolve a foundational political trauma experienced by republican government in France following the revolution of 1848.[9] The achievement of the republic brought to the fore the irreconcilable opposition between the universal rights of citizens and the property rights of capitalists. The attempt of the republican assembly to extend civil rights to include the right to work menaced the right to individual private property. After his coup d'état, Louis Napoleon's authoritarian Second Empire sustained capitalist property relations, but could not deal effectively with what was already well established as "the social question": the conditions of reproduction of the working class under savage capitalism. Socialist revolution continued to loom, as the experience of the Paris Commune demonstrated convincingly.

Donzelot signals the special importance of Émile Durkheim's theoretical work in articulating a "third way" in the 1880s and 1890s. This work portrayed the republic as a form of political association characterized by mutual dependence and "solidarity" based on the division of labour. "Solidarity" was conceived as a moral order under which both savage capitalism and socialist appropriation would be kept at bay through the enforcement, by the state, of clear normative limits to capitalist exploitation and labour market competition. Durkheim advocated the resuscitation and adaptation of an earlier (idealized) guild-like corporatism as a practical means of overcoming the twin threats of unbridled individualism and unlimited state regulation. "Solidarity", in other words, could be seen in topographic terms, as a domain,

9 Donzelot, *L'invention du social*, p. 14. So far, the argument that we should read history as psychoanalysis has escaped translation, although the work is frequently cited by English-language participants in the approach known as "history of the present". Donzelot saw his project as focused on the "historical psychoanalysis of our relation to the political", which follows the dream of just and harmonious order and which dissolves in the procedural logic of the social, and on the "political psychoanalysis of our history", which deals with the attempted solutions to the contradictions revealed upon the birth of the Republic. Since English-language "history of the present" eschews any hermeneutics of depth, it is rather surprising that Donzelot appeals to its partisans.

space, or territory mapped onto individual life and the family on the one hand, and onto the economy and state relations on the other: the space of the social. Such a reading of Durkheim allows Donzelot to analyse "the social" as an element in the formation of the twentieth-century welfare state.[10]

Donzelot's earlier work, *The Policing of Families*, focused on the transformation of the family in nineteenth-century France into an instrument of policy through the intersection of a diversity of forces: nascent feminism, capitalist transformation of the conditions of labour, and rising medical expertise, among others.[11] In his less grounded account of solidarity in *L'invention du social*, the work of producing the "social" was conducted by the translation of Durkheimian theoretical postulates into policy initiatives. The key intervention was the extension of the techniques of insurance to the matter of "unemployment". Yet Donzelot did not discuss any dimensions of the development of "the social" before Durkheim, nor offer any account of how Durkheim's analysis might have been tied to existing projects for objectifying a social domain — projects of instrumentation, for instance. Donzelot took the techniques of insurance, through which solidarity was realized, as given.

The work has thus justly been subjected to criticism. It has been suggested that Donzelot casts the problem of the social at a level of abstraction in which political tensions are worked out in theoretical texts. As George Steinmetz has remarked, "the effects of social policy are deduced from the text of contemporary laws and theoretical descriptions", and indeed it does appear in Donzelot's analysis as if the "social" were in large part the work of Durkheim's genius made into law. More seriously, as an account of the welfare state, the focus on social insurance "draws attention away from the large region of welfare-state activities that are not based on solidarities and duties". Peter Squires similarly links the construction of the domain of solidarity characteristic of the contemporary welfare state to the creation of a set of political exclusions. Practices such as selective immigration policy, incarceration, disciplinary schooling, mental institutionalization, or what John Torpey has called the development of the state monopoly over the means of movement may create commonalities — common subordination to administrative categories and practices — but the extent to which commonalities become solidarities is very much an open question.[12] On the other hand, welfare state institutions may have redistributive effects in the capitalist economy which are masked by an exclusive focus on the political nature of *solidarisme*.

10 Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1968), *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (Garden City, N.J.: Free Press, 1982), and *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (London: Routledge, 1993). Donzelot relies heavily on *The Division of Labor*, but *Professional Ethics* contains the more mature statement of the position. The theoretical problem with this sort of reading is that it tends to under-emphasize the organicist model in Durkheim's work and to ignore his focus on effects of structure.

11 Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).

12 Donzelot, *The Policing of Families*; Peter Squires, *Anti-Social Policy* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990); Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social*; John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance,*

Debates about society and the "social question" certainly predated the 1848 revolutions in Europe, and Donzelot's analysis is weakened by its punctual character. Attempts before Durkheim to depoliticize class relations were numerous and varied. As John Eyler observed of the English case, "from the [eighteen] thirties onwards middle-class people were continuously digging channels by which working class demands could be drained away from the foundations of property". Yet attempts to find communitarian and socialist solutions to the social question also abounded; they came as much from below as from above.[13] Giovanna Procacci also questions Donzelot's notion of the social as an "invention", as if it were a ruse of reason. While arguing that the emergence of the social is inextricably tied up with a strategy for depoliticizing "des inégalités (tant en matière de richesse qu'en matière d'autorité) qui traversent la société d'égaux", she suggests that its history is to be written in terms of its content, rather than simply in terms of its supposed political functions. Insurance techniques do not exhaust the substance of the social.[14]

Like most Foucauldians, Procacci locates her work against crude Marxist attempts that read "the social question" only as the history of the industrial reserve army. For her, the social is not an object that stands outside class struggle, but neither is it an instrument of class interest. The social is inherently a political construct that emerges at the point of intersection of particular forms of knowledge and administrative practices. The point against Donzelot's position is that the history of the social is a history of knowledge production and of the practical administration of class and other kinds of struggles; it does not spring into being as a bold theoretical move.

It is certainly possible to agree with Donzelot as to the centrality of the birth of the category "unemployment" in the consolidation of the social and also to attend closely to the technology of knowledge involved in its objectification. Mitchell Dean's examination of the emergence of poverty is a case in point.[15] Again, William Walters's account of national insurance in England shows that Beveridge's labour bureau was itself a site of knowledge production which "makes possible a representation of the labour market that is universal in its scope and dynamic. Rendered visible in this way, the labour market becomes a site for new types of calculation and intervention on the part of national government."[16] The positive content of the social cannot be separated from the practices, instruments, techniques, or devices which "make it visible" and objectify it.

13 For quotation, see John M. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 23; see also Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

14 Giovanna Procacci, *Gouverner la misère : la question sociale en France, 1789–1848* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), pp. 24–25.

15 Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty: Toward a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 1991).

16 William Walters, "The Discovery of 'Unemployment': New Forms for the Government of Poverty", *Economy and Society* (1994), p. 283, and *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

In contrast to Donzelot's social "invention", François Ewald's far more detailed analysis does not take statistical technique and insurance technologies as givens. Rather, Ewald argues that it is through the application of the calculus of probabilities (whose genealogy one must investigate) to state-generated observations that the realm of the social comes to be specified and objectified. Against the backdrop of the French Revolution's dream of a uniform and universal sphere of liberty and equality, Ewald investigates the fate of a liberal diagram of power confronted by the endemic proletarian misery generated by industrial capitalism. Although he does not frame the matter in quite these terms, one can see that an important issue in his analysis concerns the manner in which the "social question" imposes itself as such on the consciousness of politicians, intellectuals, reformers, and activists. It does so not simply, and likely not primarily, through their own direct experience of working-class life, although the slum tour and slum exposé literature were likely as common in France as in England. Rather, the "social question" was posed through a developing "social science" with its own modes of representation. I consider briefly the early history and the conditions of operation of the "social science" before addressing Ewald's work.

Kenneth Baker situated the earliest usages of the term "social science" in the first years of the French Revolution, especially by those close to Condorcet in the 1789 Club. The Club's membership was diverse, but it shared the proposition that the menacing chaos of revolution could be tamed if the dispassionate observational practices of the physical sciences were extended to the condition of the nation. In contrast to moral philosophy, which aimed to serve as the guide to individual happiness, the social art or social science would determine the principles of happiness of the nation as a whole. From the outset, there was a close connection between the extension of happiness and the extension of commerce. Both the extension of commerce and the systematic observation of the nation's condition demanded the standardization of a range of conditions in the nation itself, against the arcane localisms of the *ancien régime*. For Condorcet, the social science was to render human relations calculable, to make them the object of a social mathematics. To carry out this project, it was necessary to invest relations and conditions in common categories and to subject them to conventions of uniform measurement.[17]

The possibilities for a social science based on systematic observation, in France as elsewhere, were shaped by the political and administrative organization of the "nation", even as the fruits of the social science were intended to change such organization. Unevenly and partially, the revolutionary project sought to impose uniform and standard equivalences throughout French political space, as well as in the client republics. Of particular importance was the establishment of the *état civil*, which displaced the church by agencies of the state as registrar and which established and enforced a com-

17 Kenneth Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and "The Early History of the Term 'Social Science'," *Annals of Science*, vol. 20 (1964), pp. 211–226.

mon status for citizens. Related identifying practices banned honorific titles, constrained people to take their patronym, specified acceptable first names, and further regulated the names that could be taken by Jews and the Dutch.[18]

Combined with the division of the national territory into *départements*, attempts to establish uniform weights and measures, to standardize fiscal policy and even linguistic usage, the revolutionary project configured spaces and identities in ways that were conducive to statistical translation and appropriation.[19] The short-lived Bureau de Statistique promoted practical projects to generate statistical knowledge. Between the abolition of the bureau in 1811 and the establishment of the Statistique Générale de France in 1835, government statistical production operated at the local level. Yet systematic investigations of conditions in Paris were undertaken and publication of crime and related statistics began in the late 1820s.

In terms of the essays in this collection, the shifting groundwork for the common domain of "the social" is laid by administrative and related practices and conventions of classification, categorization, standardization, and reporting. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's work on classification makes the important point that integrated systems of knowledge classification and standardization, at least when they are mobilized by powerful authorities, work "by changing the world such that the system's description of reality becomes true". A powerful classification which, like the International Classification of Diseases, comes to form part of the infrastructure of investigation "enforces a certain understanding of context, place, and time. It makes a certain set of discoveries, which validate its own framework, much more likely than an alternative set outside of the framework, since the economic cost of producing a study outside of the framework of normal data collection is necessarily much higher." Of course, costs can be political as well as economic, but the self-replicating nature of enacted classifications — what Bowker and Star call "convergence" — is important to bear in mind. The commonalities that are infrastructural to the social, evidently, are abstractions — mobilized politically they may be "constitutive abstractions" — that shape life chances (school child, visible minority, illegal immigrant, senior citizen, for example) and that may be embraced or resisted by those subjected to them.[20] The essays in our collection investigate some practices

18 Anne Lefebvre-Teillard, *Le nom : droit et histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990); Desrosières, "Discuter l'indiscutable".

19 Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, *Déchiffrer la France. La statistique départementale à l'époque napoléonienne* (Paris, 1988), and "Décrire, Compter, Calculer: The Debate over Statistics During the Napoleonic Period" in Lorenz Krüger *et al.*, eds., *The Probabilistic Revolution*, vol. 1: *Ideas in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 305–316.

20 Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 49–52. For a discussion of "constitutive abstractions", see Rob Watts, "Government and Modernity: An Essay in Thinking Governmentality", *ARENA Journal*, vol. 2 (1993–1994), pp. 103–157.

of abstraction, representation, and instrumentation that subtend the discursive and programmatic objectification of the social.

François Ewald's method of analysis involves the investigation of the fate of the liberal political rationality established by the French Revolution both as a "programme" and as a "diagram" of rule.[21] Studying liberal rationality as a programme involves investigating the forms of practices it enjoins and prohibts, the manner in which it identifies and problematizes those objects that must be governed, and the calculus which precedes such practices. The notion of diagram comes from Foucault's analysis of the panopticon as a model of disciplinary power. Bentham's self-regulating machine, argued Foucault, captured a political dream of governmental arrangements which were more or less manifest in a host of interconnected institutions, and, perhaps ultimately, in the "disciplinary society" as a whole.

The notion of diagram, then, posits the existence of a general schematic plan, a fantasy or dream about what would be perfect and perfectly self-regulating political arrangements. Following Gilles Deleuze, Ewald suggests that diagrams have two characteristics. First, they are "abstract machines" in the sense just mentioned of schemas of perfect functioning in a variety of institutions that may communicate with one another. Secondly, "un diagramme est un échangeur" in both of the senses offered to us by *Robert*, namely "appareil destiné à réchauffer ou refroidir un fluide, au moyen d'un autre fluide qui circule à une température différente" and "intersection routière à plusieurs niveaux".

The liberal diagram of power presented an image of a world in which autonomous, self-regulating individuals, free to do whatever did not injure another, would pursue their self-interests and, importantly, would take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and for the situations in which they found themselves. A sharp line was drawn between the juridical order and moral phenomena: law had no place in the specification of comportment. *Laissez aller, laissez passer*: such a political order would guarantee individual and collective wealth and happiness.

Against arguments that see capitalist relations only in terms of a cash nexus, however, Ewald insists that the liberal diagram contained a profoundly moral vision of order. Self-interest co-existed with the moral obligation of benevolence. Poverty and misery were accidental occurrences, due either to the corrigible defect of individual will known as lack of foresight or to disturbing unanticipated events. In either case, the natural sympathy existing among men demanded intervention to aid the unfortunate. Such intervention was benevolent, individual, and punctual: a freely-given act of good will on the part of those who intervened. It aimed to help people to help themselves, either by correcting defects that might lead to lack of foresight or by providing necessary resources in the face of accidental events. Benev-

21 Ewald, *L'État providence*, pp. 50–51.

olence aimed to restore the subject to a condition of liberty; it was necessarily selective and temporary and was a moral rather than a legal obligation. Legislating benevolence would destroy its humane character and practical effectiveness.

The weaknesses of the liberal diagram and the lack of efficacy of liberal programmes of rule were made evident as the conditions of life and labour under industrial capitalism were generalized in France from the 1820s. At the same time, the multiplication of observational resources resulting from national and local municipal administrative organization supported new ways of objectifying such conditions. New forms of life and labour, new forms of administration, and new forms of knowledge went hand in hand. The developing social science, involved in generating and interpreting observational resources, encouraged new ways of reflecting on the "condition of the nation", and its proponents created new organs of communication in which to do so — *Les Annales d'hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, for instance.[22] In a period of rising class struggles, investigative projects, such as Louis-René Villermé's demonstration of the intimate connections between housing conditions and mortality rates in Paris, undermined the claim that poverty was an individual failing or misfortune. In Alain Desrosières's terms, through the work of investigation and abstraction, things thought to be isolated and independent came to "stay together" and the understanding of causal forces changed.[23] Poverty was seen to exist in a new form — "pauperism" — no longer an accident that occurred to an individual, but rather an injury inflicted on a population or class by existing conditions. Social science revealed the existence of effects of structure.

Framing pauperism as a "social question', in Ewald's analysis, did not cause the liberal diagram to disappear at once. However, the new kinds of projects undertaken to address it displaced the line in the diagram that separated formal juridical regulation (freedom of contract) from private moral regulation (benevolence). In the French case, the *Factory Act* of 1841, which limited children's employment, interfered with parental rights and also embodied the claim that defects of will demanded state intervention and state tutelage. Liberal philanthropic programmes paid increasing attention to the "milieu" in which men's character was formed, becoming themselves more systematic and continuous, while operating a displacement of the "social question" away from class relations in the workplace to gender relations in the household (about which Ewald has little to say).

We need not follow in any detail Ewald's analysis of the working out of the dynamic whereby attempts to address the "social question" led to the consequent erasure of the line separating the legal from the moral. What is

22 Bernard-Pierre Lecuyer, "Médecins et observateurs sociaux : *Les Annales d'hygiène publique et de médecine légale* (1820–1850)" in *Pour une histoire de la statistique* (Paris: Institut national de la Statistique et des Études économiques, 1977), pp. 445–476.

23 Desrosières, "How to Make Things".

germane is that the practices of investigation and reflection that caused the "social question" to emerge and that constituted it as a particular kind of question, amenable to certain kinds of responses, created awareness of a new order of phenomena and gave it material form: "society" and "the social". The argument is not that "society" was invented at this moment — a notion of society has a much longer pedigree, and claims about the "good of society" served to justify such initiatives as late-eighteenth-century feminist demands for women's education. Rather, society was specified through new modes of objectification: new techniques and practices for delimiting it and for making it knowable were developed. It became a new and forceful kind of object.[24]

For Ewald, it was L.-A.-J. Quetelet's analysis of the "average man" in the science called "social physics" that did the main work of objectification which led to the "social question" being read as the result of a new order of phenomena. Quételet's accomplishment was to apply the calculus of probabilities to statistical observations of human populations and to events in the nation. As Ewald put it,

> l'importance de Quetelet est d'avoir été un carrefour, un lieu de croisement, un point de précipitation. Des choses encore isolées, dispersées, séparées vont grâce à lui se mettre à communiquer et à prendre une forme nouvelle, de nouveaux développements, un nouvel avenir. Quetelet est l'homme de l'universalisation des probabilités — qui est l'échangeur universel —, celui à travers qui l'astronomie communique avec le penchant du crime; la météorologie, avec les tables de mortalité.[25]

The calculus revealed the existence of a new order of reality — "society" — and led eventually to suggestions of new means for dealing with the social question — risk technology and insurance.

Quetelet's work has attracted renewed attention in recent years (despite the fact that most North American history and sociology students still never hear his name), and this is not the place to outline his sociology in any

24 Corrigan and Sayer point out that the meaning of "society" shifted in the England of the 1820s and 1830s. Initially written as "Society" and referring to the conditions of sociation of the ruling classes (in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, some members of the lesser gentry are seen "but little in Society"), it increasingly came to be written as "society" and to refer to the conditions of sociation in the nation more generally. Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); David Frisby and Derek Sayer, *Society* (London: Tavistock, 1986). Peter Wagner makes a similar observation, relating the multiplication of little "Societies" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the emergence of "society": "The broadening of the meaning of 'society' is then a response to an observable change in the structure of social relations, i.e., in the ways the lives of human beings are connected to one another." Peter Wagner, " 'An Entirely New Object of Consciousness, of Volition, of Thought': The Coming into Being and (Almost) Passing Away of 'Society' as a Scientific Object" in Lorraine Daston, ed., *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 132–157.

25 Ewald, *L'État providence*, p. 146.

detail.[26] Ewald argues that Quetelet's application of the calculus of probabilities to statistical observations effected an epistemological break. The invention of the "average man": this move — ruse or trick — made it possible to bridge the gap between the infinite diversity of individual conditions and wills and the kinds of regularities revealed in studies of the "social question". The application of the calculus caused that dramatic decentring of the liberal political subject which is the foundational move for sociology. It now became possible to think of society as an entity in its own right, traversed by regularities which are not simply the summation of the results of individual wills. In turn, thinking of society in this way made possible a redistribution of responsibilities, away from individuals and towards the collectivity. Yet the acceptance of the social calculus also made it necessary to know the individual through its relation to society. Society came to be seen as a law-like entity, in the sense that it is the site of regularities, tendencies, and penchants that repeat themselves in determinate relations to one another. These regularities were constraining; individual life could be understood in relation to them.

The reality of society appears in the average which, for Quetelet in a consistently positive conception, is at once the form to which all individuals tend, or the axis around which they rotate, and the measure of perfection. What is germane for our purpose is to notice the new field of knowledge that is opened through the application of the calculus. While knowing the average age at death of members of a population, for instance, does not tell us the age at which any individual will die, it points to what comes to be taken as a new order of reality. It establishes a thoroughly non-metaphysical standard of judgement about individuals, and for individuals about themselves, but it also establishes a potential object for action: the average conditions of life. Moreover, through Quetelet's deployment of it, numerical representation acquired a new stature, power, and prestige. Aggregates were now entities in their own right: the sum was different than its parts.[27]

Ewald argues that the joining of the calculus of probabilities to statistical observation launches an observational spiral, a drive to observe everything, given the claimed universal applicability of the calculus. For Quetelet, such observation had to be a matter of state administration because, for masses of measurements to be useful and precise, common units of measurement had to be employed. It was the responsibility of states not only to configure relations within national populations in a manner that was susceptible to measurement, but also to store the masses of material generated. Hence Quetelet's initiatives in founding the International Statistical Congress.[28]

26 Jean-Pierre Beaud and Jean-Guy Prévost, "Back to Quételet", *Recherches sociologiques*, vol. 2 (1998), pp. 83–100; Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. Lottin, *Quételet : statisticien et sociologue* (Louvain, 1912).

27 Theodore Porter, in *Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), points out that it is Quételet whom Marx invokes in justification of his central concept "average social labour".

28 Ewald, *L'invention du social*, pp. 151–152; Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: Statistics, State Formation, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

For Ewald's analysis of the rise of the welfare state, Quetelet's work is important for its displacement of the notion of responsibility from the individual to the collectivity. While the liberal diagram of power implodes through the working out of concrete practices and struggles in France in the later decades of the nineteenth century, sociology's portrayal of society as a risky business does some of the work necessary for the social question to be taken up through insurance technologies. Social insurance is seen to be the model programme of the welfare state, and, with its generalization, we have moved beyond the liberal diagram of power. As Mitchell Dean has commented, "the development of workers' compensation, with its collectivization of risk and 'de-dramatization' of social conflicts, can be viewed as a signal case of governmental techniques of this kind".[29]

Yet just what insurance technologies signal in relation to the welfare state remains debatable. Perhaps it was credible to argue in the France of the 1980s that the generalization of social insurance would undermine liberalism; the argument appears less credible both there and in other countries where neo-liberal restructuring of the welfare state has tended to shift the burden of financial and moral responsibility for a range of conditions back onto individuals, their families and social networks. An upwards redistribution of wealth, sometimes a radical redistribution, has accompanied such restructuring. In the mid-1990s, writers like Robert Castel were considering the "metamorphosis of the social question" in the light of the failure of *solidarisme* to offer purchase on the new forms of "disaffiliation" characteristic of life in France.[30]

In any case, social insurance was only one instance — and a relatively late instance at that — of attempts to fashion domains of solidarity that would transcend class antagonism in early industrial capitalism.[31] Taking insurance as the signal case may encourage an overly benign view of the welfare state. Indeed, the accounts of the welfare state offered by Ewald, Donzelot, and other Foucauldians have justly been criticized on this ground, as well as for their tendency to read Michel Foucault's analysis of state formation (through the triangulation of sovereignty, discipline, and govern-

29 Dean, "Sociology After Society", p. 213.

30 Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale. Une chronique du salariat, l'espace du politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1995). Although he locates himself in the "history of the present", Castel's explicit engagement in social democratic politics distinguishes his work from that of many English-language contributors to this approach. As he puts it in his foreword, "Sans doute sommes-nous placés devant une bifurcation : accepter une société tout entière soumise aux exigences de l'économie, ou construire une figure de l'État social à la mesure des nouveaux défis" (p. 23). His preference is clearly for the latter.

31 For the example of prisons, see Patrick Carroll-Burke, *The Making of the Irish Convict System* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); for education, see Bruce Curtis, "The Buller Education Commission; or, the London Statistical Society Comes to Canada, 1838–42" in J.-P. Beaud and J.-G. Prévost, eds., *The Age of Numbers/ L'ère du chiffre* (Quebec: Presses Universitaires du Québec, 2000), pp. 278–297; "The State of Tutelage in Lower Canada, 1835–51", *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1997), pp. 25–43; and *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education and State Formation in Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

ment) as a stage theory.[32] Debate in the literature has carried the point that domination and discipline remain infrastructural to liberal governmentality, and we need not belabour it here. Two matters do merit further discussion: the gendered nature of the realm of the social and the uneasy development of the nineteenth-century social science in relation to statistics.

The translation of nineteenth-century class struggles around proletarian misery into the social question was bound up with a series of redefinitions of the position and roles of women and children. As Ewald himself argued, the inherently flawed political subjectivities of women and children posited by political liberalism exempted them from the responsibility and autonomy associated with the freedom to contract. Liberal and middle-class readings of the social question as a problem of male workers' domestic situation focused on women's employment and household management and on children's employment and defective education as key determinants of pauperization. Even more radical commentators like Friedrich Engels, who initially saw proletarian misery as a product of workers' competition for scarce employment, were shocked by the ways capitalist industry "unmanned" men. Capitalism demoralized the working class: the (re-)establishment of paternal dominance in the domestic realm was as central to liberal as to early socialist projects.[33]

From the first decades of the nineteenth century in Europe and America, social investigation and protective legislation created classifications in which the categories "women" and "children" were solidified and on which further investigative activity then converged, although these categories remained overdetermined by class relations. Protective legislation might regulate women's hours of employment in the textile factories or insist that children spend half days at school, but middle-class women and children were not its targets. On the contrary, the constitution of the social as a sphere of domesticity and tutelage in isolation from politics created new relations of power. Not only did middle-class women come legitimately to be active as philanthropic visitors teaching the poor how to live, but as "mothers made conscious" they entered paid employment and state bureaucracies as school teachers.[34] As Denise Riley has remarked, "insofar as the concerns of the social are the responsibility of women in the family, women are firmly tied to what has already been feminised. Women come to be objects of social investigation; but the social is also seen as a field in which they can conduct

32 Michel Foucault, "La « gouvernementalité »" in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994); Barry Hindess, "Liberalism, Socialism and Democracy: Variations on a Governmental Theme", and Alan Hunt, "Governing the City: Liberalism and Early Modern Modes of Governance" in Andrew Barry *et al.*, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason*. Nikolas Rose attempts to refute such charges in *Powers of Freedom*.

33 Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973). On the connection between state formation and family formation, see Pavla Miller, *Transformations of Patriarchy in the West, 1500–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

34 Carolyn Steedman, " 'The Mother Made Conscious' ", *History Workshop Journal.*

enquiry and have a moral influence. And the conceptualisation of the social in these terms severs it from politics." But the constitution of the social as a moral domain for women and their demonstrative capacity to act and organize in it provide a basis for the eruption of the values of the domestic back into the political — for instance, as demands for enfranchisement and movements for moral purity.[35]

Numbers exploded into the lives of Europeans and Americans from the first decades of the nineteenth century, and public school systems sought to make everyone a counter and a calculator.[36] Statistics increasingly lost its earlier meaning as a general inventory of all the conditions in the nation and came to be seen more or less completely as knowledge in numerical form. Numerical and statistical representations coexisted in an uneasy or ambiguous relation to narrative and literary description, but they were of central importance in the objectification of the social question. As we have seen, for Quételet, society lived in measures derived from large-scale observations — in what Durkheim would later call "social facts". Yet Quetelet's claims for statistics were unusually sophisticated and were also controversial, both politically and morally, to many of his contemporaries. It would be as misleading to present the history of the social as driven by sustained theoretical reflection on statistics as it would be to suggest that "social facts" were simply the result of dispassionate observations.

Complex relations obtained among the techniques of knowledge production that yielded the "avalanche of numbers", theoretical reflection on the significance of statistics, and policy and practice that applied statistical thinking to problems and issues. The increasing administrative capacities of nineteenth-century states, which resulted from the inroads of bureaucratic organization and from the generalization of new investigative instruments such as inspection, interacted with the capitalist transformation of media of communication (via things such as steam printing and improved methods for paper production) to yield massive volumes of statistical material which could be distributed widely. In the Canadian case, for instance, an extremely

35 Riley, *Am I That Name?*, p. 50; also Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1880s–1920s* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).

36 Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (New York: Harvester, 1975); Jean-Jacques Droesbeke and Phillipe Tassi, *Histoire de la statistique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990); L. Goldman, "Statistics and the Science of Society in Britain: A Social Context for the G.R.O.", *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1991), pp. 415–434; Ian Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers", *Humanities in Society*, vol. 5 (1982), pp. 279–295; Sylvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stuart J. Woolf, "Towards the History of the Origins of Statistics: France, 1789–1815" in J.-C. Perron and Stuart J. Woolf, eds., *State and Statistics in France 1789–1815* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers GmmbH, 1984), pp. 81–194.

small state administration was producing more documentary material by 1855 than parliament could even pay to print. Yet statistical bulimia seemed often to result from no particular administrative or political interest; it was not a footnote to political reason. There was certainly no simple line of determination running from well-articulated "rationalities of government" towards statistical investigation as a "technology of government". As Theodore Porter put it, "practice was decidedly ahead of theory during the early history of statistics, and 'pure' or abstract statistics was the offspring, not the parent, of its applications".[37]

Routine administrative questions and practical attempts at particular moral reforms, rather than theoretical reflection, led the development of nineteenth-century British social science, as Philip Abrams's *Origins of British Sociology* stressed. The activity of the London Statistical Society is illustrative. The society was founded in 1834 (Quetelet had a hand in it), two years after the organization of the first English government statistics agency within the Board of Trade. Like its counterpart in Manchester, founded in 1833, the London society was explicitly charged with investigating the kinds of questions that were beyond the purview of the government body. Yet there was considerable overlap between the membership of the statistical societies and the state service. James Kay, for instance, whom Poovey credits with the elaboration of a common method of social investigation, a founding member of the Manchester society, was later secretary to the Privy Council Committee on Education, and there was also Rawson W. Rawson, at one and the same time secretary to the London Statistical Society and secretary to the Board of Trade. Abrams remarks that the early London society looked like a Whig government sub-committee.[38]

As others have since noted as well, the London society sought explicitly to exclude debate and discussion of doctrine in its meetings and publications. The dispassionate collection of the facts was to be its main object, and facts were presented numerically, at least in part. The supposed neutrality of numerical representation was one instrument for the depoliticization of the consequences of capitalist industrialization when they were read as the social question. Abrams shows that, of the 511 papers produced in the London society's first 50 years, only 11 concerned matters of statistical method and only 8 addressed political questions directly, although a number took up administrative or institutional matters. It was only rarely the case that the question to be investigated was seen to be sufficiently obscure as to require preliminary study. The society could investigate matters without any prior

37 Porter, *Statistical Thinking*, p. 11; Bruce Curtis, "Selective Publicity and Informed Public Opinion in the Canadas, 1841–1856", *History of Education Review*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1998), pp. 1–19.

38 Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology: 1834–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Mary Poovey, "Curing the 'Social Body' in 1832: James Phillips Kay and the Irish in Manchester", *Gender & History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1993), pp. 196–211, and *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

framing of the object of enquiry, and could report on findings without contentious debate, because a deep-seated utilitarian Christian meliorism provided a consensus about what was to be found and what was to be done about it.[39]

Statistical representations thus served potentially as political capital, a point carried home by Samuel Finer's analysis of the penetration of Benthamite utilitarianism into the English state system in the first half of the nineteenth century. Finer read the nineteenth-century English "revolution in government" as a dynamic process of knowledge politics. Benthamite reformers exploited new media of communication to promote moral panics around matters such as conditions in factories, the absence of education for children, and urban sanitation. Repeatedly, such conditions demanded enquiry; enquiry confirmed the necessity for reform; the necessity for reform led to declarative legislation that often extended powers of enquiry; further enquiry showed declarative legislation to be ineffective without enforcement and regular monitoring; enforcement and regular monitoring promoted the growth of new government departments and locked the condition at issue into administrative categories.[40]

The investigations that helped form and objectify the social commonly claimed to reveal the "facts". As Mary Poovey has shown, facts are peculiar phenomena, and the belief that truth resides in them has a complex history.[41] Modern facts are at once supposedly meaningful particulars and pieces of evidence that point to more general orders of significance. The modern fact thus contains an inherent tension and is continually faced with the possibility of implosion. Its ability to signify as a particular in its own right is threatened by its necessary dependence upon some overarching theoretical schema. Only systematic inattention to the latter can preserve the taken-for-grantedness which is the "factualness" of facts. For Poovey, the history of the modern fact is in large measure the story of attempts to maintain the gap between the fact as a theoretical construct and the fact as a product of empirical perception.

The social question was depoliticized in large part through attempts to render it a factual question represented in numbers. In the English case, Poovey signals the importance of the work of J. R. McCulloch in sustaining factual modes of representation by making the separation between fact and theory a matter of the division of intellectual labour. The production of facts would be conducted neutrally by observers like those in the statistical

39 Lawrence Goldman, "The Social Science Association: A Context for Mid-Victorian Liberalism", *English Historical Review* (1986), pp. 95–134, and "The Social Science Association and the Absence of Sociology in Nineteenth Century Britain", *Past and Present*, vol. 114 (1987), pp. 154–161; V. L. Hilts, "*Aliis Exterendum*, or, the Origins of the Statistical Society of London", *Isis*, vol. 69 (1978), pp. 21–43.

40 Samuel E. Finer, "The Transmission of Benthamite Ideas, 1820–50" in Gillian Sutherland, ed., *Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth Century Government* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 11–32. See also Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800–1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

41 Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*.

societies. Political economists would then divine the essential significance and the policy implications of facts thus collected. To complete the circle, education, especially of the working classes, would create the necessary appreciation for the rationality of policy as articulated by political economy and based on the facts.

Yet the political content of factual representation intruded repeatedly and in a variety of forms in nineteenth-century debate over statistics and the social. Statistics were viciously satirized as the assassin of the human imagination in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, where a McCulloch-like figure, who "had it in charge from high authority to bring about the great public-office millenium [*sic*], when commissioners should reign upon the earth", declared that "we hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact".[42] The English workers' movement attacked attempts by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to make political economy and the physical sciences the subject matter of popular education on the grounds of the political character of what the society claimed were neutral facts. What workers wanted was "really useful knowledge" that would lead to political liberation.[43]

Several authors have underlined the importance of nineteenth-century medical debate in projects to promote the utility and legitimacy of large-scale investigation and of knowledge of the social via statistical representation and calculation. Yet practising family physicians, clinicians, proponents of experimental medicine, sanitarians or anti-contagionists, and fledgling demographers squared off repeatedly over the worth of medical statistics.[44] Here again the existence of effects of structure was partly what was at issue. Statistical investigation made inroads into medical science in areas such as the investigation of the success of smallpox vaccination and in heated debates over the effectiveness of bloodletting as a therapeutics. In France, a pathbreaking set of investigations by the medical doctor Louis-René Villermé in the early 1830s drew on detailed statistical data for the city of Paris to connect mortality rates and levels of poverty. Similar studies fuelled the debates between contagionists and sanitarians over the causes of cholera in the wake of the 1832 epidemic.[45]

42 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Heinemann, 1960 [1854]), pp. 4–6. Poovey claims M'Choakumchild is modelled after McCulloch, but this seems dubious since M'Choakumchild is a trained schoolmaster. Rather it is the "third gentleman" who makes the remarks I have cited that is a more likely model for McCulloch.

43 Richard Johnson, " 'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Working Class Culture" in J. Clarke *et al.*, eds., *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1979).

44 This debate and similar ones have been discussed repeatedly in the literature on the history of statistics and medical knowledge. I follow Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

45 François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris, 1832* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986); Catherine J. Kudlick, *Cholera in Post-Revolutionary Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

The growing scepticism and political concern of some doctors faced with the proliferation of statistical knowledges was intensified by the formation of the Statistique Générale de France in 1835 and the regular statistical reporting that ensued. In 1837 a debate in the Académie de Médecine centred on the ontological status of the objects of statistical investigation, on the practical utility of statistical knowledge for medical practice, and, Joshua Cole suggests, on the political import of statistical reasoning. Family physicians and experimental clinicians, concerned to deal with particular sick individuals or with pathological lesions, argued that statistics were of no practical use. Knowing that more people died in one Paris *arrondissement* than in another offered nothing for the treatment of the sick individual in the clinic nor for unlocking the secrets of morbid states in bodily organs: the causal mechanisms of illness remained opaque. Moreover, it was claimed that statistical averages and rates were simply products of thought: the "average" illness had no ontological status, it was never to be met with empirically. Statisticians were forced to render what was essentially different the same in order to produce their averages and rates; in doing so they disregarded the individualizing characteristics of illness, which were precisely what the doctor was to combat. Furthermore, the construction of false statistical equivalences disregarded the indispensable subjective role of the doctor in medical treatment. It was the trained and empathetic doctor alone who could diagnose, who could divine the underlying signs of illness in the body from the patient's symptoms.

Because averages did not exist, statistics was a form of fantasy at best. Worse, according to Cole, some medical opinion in the 1830s connected the privileging of the majority or of the average in statistical analysis with unbridled democracy and with the attacks on élite privilege characteristic of proletarian unrest under the July Monarchy. The statistical form was seen to be a shamelessly democratic political form.

Sanitarians, by contrast, even while unable to point to precise causal mechanisms, were increasingly able to make the claim that engineering the conditions of life and labour of different social classes yielded demonstrable consequences for mortality and morbidity at the level of populations. A centrally important instance was John Snow's use of the English General Register Office's reports of death by cause and locality to support the claim that cholera was waterborne. In William Coleman's evocative phrase, it was seen that "death is a social disease".[46] Moreover, the practical utility of constructing variations in rates of death and disease in terms of averages or optima reinforced the belief that statistical entities had a firm ontological status, even if they were not accessible by the senses. Statistical investigation was increasingly legitimated in what came to be seen as "social" medicine in the

46 William Coleman, *Death Is a Social Disease: Public Health and Political Economy in Early Industrial France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); John Snow, *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera*, 2nd ed. (London: John Churchill, 1855).

following decades. By the late 1850s, the early demographer Louis-Adolphe Bertillon could argue credibly in relation to infant mortality that statistics constituted a tool for making things visible: infants died, but only the population of infants had mortality. Individual deaths could be prevented by unlocking the causes of mortality at the level of population. Perhaps the consecration of the union of medicine and statistics can be found in Émile Durkheim's 1895 portrayal of the role of the sociologist in relation to society as like that of the medical doctor.[47]

From the second decade of the nineteenth century, the social question was taken up and objectified through a variety of forms of investigation and practices of representation. The social acquired a firmer ontological status by being materialized in representational devices and instruments. Tables, charts, maps, questionnaires, numerical summaries, graphs, photographs, and so on invest social relations in forms that are manipulable, measureable, scaleable, transportable, actionable. Such instruments lend new forms of visibility to relations and conditions, as they seem to fix the social as an object which might form the grounds for a science. The history of the social is in part a history of technology.

Yet such instruments are also what Bruno Latour has called "immutable mobiles", devices that change conditions observed in localities by translating them onto the flat surfaces of texts and that render them manipulable in centres of calculation, from whence they may come again to challenge conditions in localities. In this sense, immutable mobiles launch the social into movement. Indeed, in a retrospective reflection on the branch of science studies known as "actor-network theory", Latour proposes that the major accomplishment of this approach has been "to have transformed the social from what was a surface, a territory, a province of reality, into a circulation".[48] Mapping the "social question" onto the universalizing domain of state-political subordination had, as one of its historical consequences, the translation of class domination into matters of gender, racial, and age domination. I use the concept "translation" here in the original sense of its employment in actor-network theory, where it resonates with its close companions "rendering" and "treason" to indicate the process whereby one thing is treated as the equivalent of another.[49] The argument is not that age, gen-

47 Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, especially the chapter "The Normal and the Pathological". Compare Rose's account of "diagnostics", scattered throughout *Powers of Freedom* (but see pp. 57–59).

48 Bruno Latour, "On Recalling Ant" in John Law and John Hassard, eds., *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999), p. 19.

49 Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay" in John Law, ed., *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 197–233; Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands", *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, vol. 6 (1986), pp. 1–40; John Law, "Introduction: Monsters, Machines and Sociotechnical Relations" in Law, ed., *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*

der, and racial domination are epiphenomenal in relation to a more fundamental class domination, but rather that projects to govern and administer class in the field of population commonly work by a characteristic set of displacements and juxtapositions.

Some Foucauldian accounts tend to envisage the social in the topographical terms to which Latour objects. In Nikolas Rose's account, for instance, "the social" is treated primarily as a space of disciplinary enclosures where elements of population are grouped together and subjected to various forms of treatment.[50] For such accounts, the mobility of the social is limited to changes in its location on a liberal governmental map: the mix of public and private provision of services, for instance, varies historically. Actor-network theory would suggest rather that the social be analysed as a circuit of knowledge production and practical intervention, of representations and practices that institutionalize representations, of abstractions that guide actions that produce problems, and so on. The argument here is closely related to the basic tenet of ethnomethodology, that the sense we have of the world as an orderly place is a product of the activities we engage in to sustain that sense. One leading methodological injunction is that we should attend to the messy, variegated, ongoing, local recursive practices out of which apparently stable structures are constituted.[51]

To argue that the social is a mobile abstraction that has no existence apart from the practices, instruments, and devices that materialize it (including governmental policy and administrative organization) is to circumvent, if not simply to reject, a correspondence theory of the relation between representation and reality. John Law and John Whittaker argue that representational practices and the devices that do the work of representation are inherently political in the sense that they allow the few to take the place of the many. The work of representation, in science as in government, is a double work of speaking and silencing, a work of translation. Law and Whittaker suggest there are at least five modes of visual representation employed in scientific practice: reference to another text, which attempts to bolster the authority of a present text by appeals to established texts; a rhetoric of argument, in which visual material is placed in a mutually reinforcing relation with text; techniques of quantification, which suppress variation and merge objects into more docile forms; photographic realism, which claims to present things "as

---

don: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1–23, and "After Ant: Complexity, Naming and Topology" in John Law and John Hassard, eds., *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Sociological Review Monograph, 1999), pp. 1–14; Pierre Bourdieu, *Science de la science et réflexivité. Cours du Collège de France, 2000–2001* (Paris: Éditions Raisons d'Agir, 2001).

50 Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, especially chap. 3. For instance, Rose approvingly quotes Deleuze: " '*the* social refers to a *particular sector*, in which quite diverse problems and special cases can be grouped together...' " (p. 101).

51 Michael Lynch, *Scientific Practice and Ordinary Action: Ethnomethodology and Social Studies of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

they really are" but which also selects and renders docile; and finally what they treat as visual representation proper, like the diagram or graph or table, that uses particulars as exemplars of general classes of objects and manipulates them to establish relations among them.[52]

Representations mingle in effective ways with objects of intervention. Representational devices, instruments, and practices have their own histories. They emerge in particular contexts but migrate to others; their technical potential, practical utility, and aesthetic appeal vary. This is true even of the supposedly more "realistic" modes of representation such as photography. Lewis Hine's innovative use of photomontage in *Survey Graphic* increased the impact of the early twentieth-century American campaign against child labour. Yet, in the nineteenth-century popular press, the displacement of illustrations based on artists' conceptions by photogravure sharply limited the extent to which readers could be present at the scene of some events. Its detailed, context-bound specificity, which is the foundation of claims for the realism of photography, makes photographic representation less useful than stylized drawing in cases where practices have to be generalized to a variety of contexts.[53]

One interest of contributors to this collection is to investigate deployments of such things as the questionnaire, the interview, the survey, and inspectoral practice. Such devices and instruments are shaped by struggles surrounding what it means to know something and which individuals and groups can lay claim to knowledge. Once stabilized, however, these devices and instruments become detachable from their own conditions of emergence and may come to serve a variety of purposes. As Mary Poovey notes, for instance, the growing epistemological prestige of numerical representation from the seventeenth century encouraged "gestural mathematics" as a tactic in political and economic debate. Numbers would be invoked without anyone having done the work of counting anything. Or, perhaps, stray objects would be counted and the numerical presentation of them would be supposed to signify simply by virtue of its numerical character. The relation between instruments and knowledge-producing practices is complex, and social science can be scientistic without being scientific. Techniques and devices may be mobilized ritualistically or symbolically; arguments and

52 John Law and John Whittaker, "On the Art of Representation: Notes on the Politics of Visualisation" in Gordon Fyfe and John Law, eds., *Picturing Power: Visual Depiction and Social Relations* (London: Routledge, Sociological Review Monograph 35, 1988), pp. 160–183.

53 John Law and Michael Lynch, "Lists, Field Guides, and the Descriptive Organization of Seeing: Birdwatching as an Exemplary Observational Activity" in Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, eds., *Representation in Scientific Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 267–299. There is an excellent exhibition catalogue entitled *America and Lewis Hine: Photographs, 1904–1940* (Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture Inc., 1977). Michèle Martin's work in progress on the nineteenth-century illustrated press shows that the displacement of engraving by photography meant, among other things, that readers could no longer see crimes in progress, but had to be content with crime scenes after the

claims may seek a patina of scientific respectability by adopting certain representational modes.[54]

I suggest that histories of the social should indeed attend to the myriad messy, local practices of organization, investigation, and meaning-making which come to form the infrastructural supports for the existence of "social" objects. Techniques of investigation, forms and practices of representation, attempts to group together and to standardize activities and accounts of them are essential elements of the construction of the social. Knowledge of how the social is produced will obviously encourage reflection on alternative methods of construction. Yet dissolving the social and society into knowledge techniques and strategies of representation seriously limits realist attempts to grasp effects of structure. It sharply limits (if not simply discounts) the possibilities for the production of objective knowledge, and hence calls into question the possibility of sociology and social history as truthful discourses. Showing that knowledge depends on knowledge production practices may tempt one to adopt a radical relativist position.

Some deconstructionist work explicitly encourages the elimination of "society" as an object that can do work of explanation. Such is the thrust of adopting the move that Ann Game has described as "undoing the social", and perhaps Latour's analysis of the "modern constitution" of knowledge could be read in this way, too.[55] Both strategies remove the social and society as explanatory instruments and encourage interrogations about the object of knowledge claimed for "social" history and for sociology, the *logos* of the social. Game has argued that "sociology's typical self-representation is that its distinctive concern is with the representation of the social: it is a social *science* (and a *social* science)". Game suggests "that the sociological *fiction* is that it is not fiction. To put this another way, the sociological fiction is that it is possible for the subject of sociological knowledge to know the object, the social. Definition as a science avoids the issue of how meaning is produced in the discipline."[56]

Directed at either a sociology or a social history that would claim to base itself on a perfectly transparent relation between the subject and object of knowledge, or at a functionalist analysis that would see "society" as an actor possessed of will and intention, such deconstructionist critique is helpful. It has less purchase on reflexive versions of sociology and social history. These recognize the conventional nature of the claims of science to truth. They situate the subjects of knowledge in discursive fields. They are attentive to the construction of objects of knowledge. Yet they insist on the limit-

54 Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, p. 185; Joel Best, *Damned Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

55 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

56 Game, *Undoing the Social*, p. 38.

ing and enabling effects of the structure of social relations. Such histories and sociologies both interrogate and operate their concepts.

Social history and sociology, as Pierre Bourdieu has remarked, are condemned to be controversial because they have not managed to establish the conditions of the production of scientific knowledge in which "the real", as constructed conventionally with the available instrumentation, can arbitrate disputes. Not only is "the real" itself a matter of dispute, but the lack of widely shared truth conventions means that it is acceptable for some sociologists and social historians to practise their disciplines while claiming that no such truth conventions are conceivable. Other practitioners attempt to justify a "one best story", but the matters on which all sociologists or social historians can agree are so limited as to be of little use.[57]

There is no obvious escape from such controversy, but the tension between situated local practices and general structural effects has been and continues to be productive. Still, as Peter Wagner has remarked, minimally, sociology and social history need some sort of concept of "society" or "the social" as the "*representation of the state of social relations*". Investigating the practices, instruments, and devices involved in the making of "the social" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and America offers insight into the ways this object has been constructed, materialized, and made objective. We might also heed Wagner's warning: "If 'society' is currently out of fashion without being superseded by a more appropriate concept, this means that a political sociology that conflated issues in conceptual shortcuts has been replaced on the one hand by a return to a sociologically ill informed political philosophy, and on the other by a sociology that is blind to political issues."[58]

My own position is that the social and society are inherently political objects, and in a double sense. Their construction and use depend upon the establishment and realization or enforcement of practical equivalences. The fact of equation and the choice of objects of equation are matters of political power. Again, the identification of effects of structure points to the existence of a domain of common concern, in which individual variation is juxtaposed to regular relations. The tension between the two remains the common object of sociology and social history.

57 Bourdieu, *Science de la science*; Timothy Stanley, "Why I Killed Canadian History: Conditions for an Anti-Racist History in Canada", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 33, no. 65 (2000), pp. 79–104.

58 Wagner, " 'An Entirely New Object of Consciousness, of Volition, of Thought' ".