

deployed for containing unruly mobility and highlighting what each of them reveals about *the making of migration*' (author's emphasis).

To be sure, though these migrant multiplicities and singularities are characterised by fragmentation, heterogeneity and disjuncture, Tazzioli succeeds in piecing them together to form a strong, political intervention. Readers are pushed to understand the European social,

political and historical present in different ways, a provocation which though somewhat exhausting in its constant impulse to put things on the move, is also highly original and galvanising. *The Making of Migration* mobilises radical relationality and transversal connections to study emerging political formations and the subjects that inhabit them.

Emma Mc Cluskey

Homo desiderans

Miguel de Beistegui, *The Government of Desire: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2018). ix+295pp., £34.00 hb., 978 0 22654 737 4

Miguel de Beistegui's new book is one of the most important contributions to the study of desire since the publication of René Girard's *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987). The central argument of the work is that the creation – through specific rationalities of knowledge and technologies of power – of a type of subjectivity (*homo desiderans*) is the mechanism that allowed modern capitalism to transform into neoliberalism and power to translate into its biopolitical double. For, if neoliberalism is essentially characterised by a form of governance that privileges the management of productive subjects over their repressive control (the carrot instead of the stick), then it is crucial to understand the mechanisms that push individuals to move relentlessly according to the models and the new economic geography created by neoliberal capitalism. Desire is precisely one of these mechanisms in that it is constituted as a *structural negativity* (i.e., as an infinity of always different carrots, or, to speak more directly, as an 'ontological lack' construed by the various *epistemai* of power) – which generates *hyper-positivity* at the subjective level through the incessant individual search for pleasures and products that the 'free market' constantly manufactures.

Drawing on the late Foucault's work on sexuality, de Beistegui traces a convincing genealogy of this transcendental-historical *dispositif* by examining three fundamental assemblages or regimes of desire: the economic, the sexual and the symbolic. As he demonstrates, these three regimes are interdependent and

self-reinforcing because they are born out of the same paradigm, i.e. the disciplinary rationality that characterises modern bio-power. Thus, for example, starting from the eighteenth century, the emergence of liberal political economy (i.e. Physiocracy) established a new discourse on negative freedom that, on the one hand, seemed to free individuals from the control of the state, but, on the other, subjected them to the new rules set by the market. Self-interest and utility thus become the watchwords of a libidinal economic system based on the 'free maximisation' of desires, which can now be purchased for money. In this way, desire 'is naturalised, and seen as a form of positive energy, that is, as a spontaneous mechanism generating its own norms'.

This new paradigm of governance allows, in turn, the birth of a science of sexuality, which is no longer repressive but normative. Indeed, the problem of 'natural' interest creates the need for further rationalisations and normalisations: if individuals are maximisers of pleasure and utility, how to explain the motives behind 'aberrant' crimes and, so the narrative goes, sexual acts 'against nature'? It is precisely at this historical juncture that, according to de Beistegui, new concepts such as 'sexual perversion' and 'abnormality' appear in the psychiatric literature in order to create further barriers of exclusion between 'good' (i.e. natural and economic) and 'bad' (i.e. perverted and criminal) desires. In short, the discursive occupation of 'desire' generates a new totalising system of norms, which branches out into different fields

of knowledge following the trajectory indicated by economic rationality.

Mirroring this development is the birth of a type of subjectivity characterised by the constant affirmation of the 'self' as the ultimate source of authority. For, within the network of desires, *homo symbolicum* is a creature that must constantly individualise herself by knowing what she wants. The struggles for recognition that occur on both the individual level (through practices of self-esteem, self-management, self-respect, mindfulness, etc.) and the collective level (through the recognition of one's minority rights, one's culture, one's identity, e.g. LGBT+ rights) can be read, first and foremost, as self-individualising processes. According to de Beistegui, this politics of self-identification involves serious limitations in that it pushes socio-political minorities to play by the rules, assumptions and models of the same assemblage of power that had initially excluded them. This critique of identity politics has the undoubted merit of exploring, in a new light, some of the fundamental issues that animated the debate between Habermas and Taylor on the political role of minorities. (Although it should be said that, in rule of law systems, there can be no *pure individuals* but only *legal persons*, i.e., access to rights is only possible by identifying oneself as belonging to specific socio-political categories: BAME groups, disabled people, single mothers, etc.)

The Government of Desire is an exceptionally rich *tour-de-force* of a complex history – that of the naturalisation of desire, which the book subjects to critical scrutiny. This intellectual operation is more notable if one considers that even Marx had ignored the fundamental difference between wants, needs and desires. As he writes in the opening of *Capital*, volume 1: 'A commodity is ... an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs ... *whether they arise from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference*'. De Beistegui shows quite convincingly that it is precisely in the chasm between 'natural needs' and 'artificial desires' that the forces, discourses and models of liberalism have managed to transform the repressive forms of power into neoliberal governmentality *by and for* desire.

Nonetheless, if the book's genealogy stands out for its theoretical richness and analytical acumen, de Beistegui's *pars construens* seems to take a step back from

its initial assumptions. For, it remains somewhat unclear how and, above all, on what grounds, we may activate strategies of desubjectivation. In the final pages of the book, the uncomfortable legacy of Kojève's metaphysics of Desire, which has so much influenced and limited French thought in the last fifty years, still seems to resonate. Consider, as an example, the following passage:

Become in order not to recognise (even yourself)! Lose yourself, undo yourself! For only then – when experimentation replaces normalisation, and when the processes of subjectivation are traversed and overwhelmed by life lines, untamable intensities – *can desire reveal its immanent voluptuousness* (emphasis added).



This possibility of desubjectivation by means of individual forms of resistance raises two fundamental questions: 1. If, as the book argues, desire is always a historical assemblage of specific rationalities of power and knowledge, how can a 'sovereign', a sort of zero degree, or anarchic form of Desire exist or be accessed? 2. In a slightly abstract way, de Beistegui places within the subject the endogenous possibility of liberation from precisely those mechanisms that had constituted its 'self'. The fact is that desire, being an assemblage of historical power relations, can never be Desire (as de Beistegui, following Deleuze, seems to indicate). In fact, the potency of desire lies in its being a *relational dispositif*. Girard is

perhaps the scholar who has considered this issue in the closest detail in recent years. Reflecting on the epistemic and sociogenetic role of desire, he writes in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*:

Humankind is that creature who lost a part of its animal instinct in order to gain access to 'desire', as it is called. Once their natural needs are satisfied, humans desire intensely, but they don't know exactly what they desire, for no instinct guides them. We do not each have our desire, one really our own. The essence of desire is to have no essential goal. Truly to desire we must have recourse to people about us; we have to borrow their desires. [...] If our desires were not mimetic, they would be forever fixed on predetermined objects; they would be a particular form of instinct. Human beings could no more change their desire than cows their appetite for grass. Without mimetic desire there would be neither freedom nor humanity.

According to Girard, desire is part of human nature and, as such, is a transhistorical dimension. At the same time, however, being an 'empty' dimension, so to speak, desire constantly varies its morphology under the pressure exerted by historical configurations of power. In other words, desire is both historical and phylogenetic; it is, in Foucault's parlance, a transcendental-historical *dispositif*. Yet, precisely for this reason, the subjective overcoming of the regimes of power and desire is not possible through a simple distancing (i.e. play or Bar-

tleby's 'I would prefer not to'), an escape (i.e. idleness or inactivity) or a leap into an undefined Becoming (which would be nothing but a leap into the void of Desire). The liberation from the regimes of desirability created by neo-liberalism cannot take place (to use a metaphor dear to Nietzsche) *à la* Munchausen, which is to say by means of a metaphysical lifting of the subject who, pulling herself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamp of desires, is able to access the Impersonal, the Singular, the Outside – as de Beistegui suggests, in the wake of Foucault and Deleuze. The point is that a form of power that controls – and develops inside – *omnes et singulatim* requires a resistance that acts on both these levels (the individual and the masses).

It is at this level, then, that de Beistegui's argument meets its limitations: what *concrete* models can we imagine and, above all, embody in order to create alternative forms of life to the hedonism-consumerism-productivism that characterises the society of the integrated spectacle? The answer to this question remains open. Yet, if it is true that 'the real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes', this book is an excellent guide to start imagining a novel geography of resistance. The ways to inhabit it, inevitably, will have to be decided through historical and social conflict.

Antonio Cerella

