



Cipher and Dividuality

GERALD RAUNIG

The “Postscript on Control Societies” is considered one of the most accessible texts by Gilles Deleuze, contemporary, yet untimely, ahead of its time, perhaps even ahead of our time. In just a few pages, Deleuze here touches on the specifics of discipline and control and subjects them to three perspectives: history, logic, program. On closer reading, however, one comes across some stumbling blocks, where thinking falters. The paragraph in which the word ‘dividual’ appears for the first time in the text is such an instance. Of course, the individuals of control become dividuals, and the masses become banks. But what does ‘code’ mean here, and what is the difference between the ‘precept’ of disciplinary society and the ‘password’ of control society? As is so often the case, the key lies in questions of context and translation.

Discipline proceeds in a double manner, via signature and number: the signature identifies individuals and the number registers their position in a mass. For disciplinary regimes, there is no incompatibility between individualization and identification, on the one hand, and massification and comprehensive policing, on the other. *Omnes et singulatim* is the Christian-pastoral battle cry that Michel Foucault used for this. Disciplinary government is about isolation as an interpellating and ordering formation of individuals, who are simultaneously interpellated and ordered as a totality. In terms of political theory, this means: “Just to look at nascent state rationality, just to see what its first policing project was, makes it clear that, right from the start, the state is both individualising and totalitarian.”¹ (Foucault 1981: n.p.)

The second section of the postscript is not called *logic* for nothing. The differentiation of several functions of number and numeral points back to their genealogies in (late) antique Aristotelian and Neoplatonic logic and in medieval scholasticism. The two components of discipline, identification of individuals and registration of their position within masses, correspond to the classical distinction between cardinal and ordinal number. While the cardinal number counts the quantity, the ordinal number indicates a certain position in the regular structure of relationships of this quantity.

¹ Cf. also Foucault 1983: n.p., where Foucault speaks of “the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures”.



Regardless of the distinction between these questions of “how many?” and “what number?” (first, second, third, ...), another Aristotelian distinction is that between the number that is counted and the number that we count with. Via Boethius, this difference between numbered and numbering number continues to have an effect in the Middle Ages and in the neighboring zones of metaphysics and logic. In the nomadological plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to this very distinction when they distinguish the state-territorial organization of societies from the numerical-nomadic organization. ‘Numerical organization’ at first sounds like the everyday wisdom of the humans being reduced to a number. But this figure of the numbered human being as a statistical element actually belongs rather to the numbering and measuring on the part of the state and disciplinary regimes than to what Deleuze and Guattari now introduce as a numerical organization. True, the number does play a decisive role in the state apparatus, but as a *numbered number*, as a number that is numbered and measured, e.g. in “the imperial bureaucracy, with the three conjoined operations of the census, taxation, and election” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 389). Here, the number is connected with measurable quantities, with the counting of units identified as such, with the segmentation and striation of the territory as a given one.

By contrast, in the nomadic nomos, the *numbering number* corresponds to an ‘autonomous’ arithmetical organization. One genealogy of the counting number is the Indo-Arab genealogy of decimal numbers, as developed by Al-Chwarizmi in Baghdad in the 9th century and translated from Arabic into Latin by Robert of Chester and Gerard of Cremona in Toledo in the middle of the 12th century. Deleuze and Guattari take up another genealogy as the numerical organizing principle of the nomadic war machines, such as those of the Hyksos and of other worlds with a strong nomadic component. Here, the number “is no longer a means of counting or measuring, but of moving: it is the number itself that moves through smooth space.” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 389) No measurement of given territories, the numbering number draws dividual lines, shifting space and itself in it. When the number itself numbers, it subjectivates itself, no longer subject to a given, striated, streaked territory, but in a constant movement of de- and reterritorialization. “The number becomes a principle whenever it occupies a smooth space, and is deployed within it as subject, instead of measuring a striated space. [...] The numbering number is no longer subordinated to metric determinations or geometrical dimensions, but has only a dynamic relation with geographical directions: it is a directional number, not a dimensional or metric one.” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 389f) The arithmetic of the numbering number is tactless, inharmonic, rhythmic and directional. Unmeasurable rhythms, routes, ritornellos.

As a numbering number, the number can become that which is movable in smooth space, mobile occupant, wandering fire; then, the territory orders itself according to the now ‘autonomous’ numbers that shift and spread out on it. And eventually, the number



is transformed once again in the nomos of numerical organization: “[i]n [...] nomadic existence, the number is no longer numbered, but becomes a Cipher” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 390). Thus, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, there is a final transition from the difference between the numbered and the numbering number to the cipher, the *nombre chiffré*. Deleuze takes this transition up again ten years later in the “Postscript”: for control, there is no relevance in the distinction between signatures and numbers. It tends to have no need to identify individuals, to register their position in a mass through a number. What becomes essential instead of signature and number is – the cipher. And here two interesting deviations occur in the translation of the French original: the German translation by Gustav Roßler translates the French *chiffre* – one could say: too closely – with the German loanword *Chiffre*. The English translation by Martin Joughin goes the opposite way and translates too loosely: *chiffre* here becomes ‘code’.

In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as a *creatio continua* of concepts. In their attempt to outline what a concept is, the cipher again functions as a central figure. The concept has an irregular outline, it can neither be subjected to the logic of numbering and determining of positions, nor can it be all-encompassing, encompassing all components. And above all, as the first sentence of the first chapter of *What Is Philosophy?* declares, “[t]here are no simple concepts.” (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 15) A concept is a multiplicity, it has several components: “It therefore has a [cipher²].” (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 15)

The cipher is not a number in the sense of numbering, of counting. It stands for the multiplicity, for the plurality of components of that which is not simple and not one. The cipher is that which constitutes the irregular outline of the multiplicity and its components. The components are heterogeneous, they are clearly separated from one another and yet characterized by partial overlaps, processes of becoming and thresholds. They are parts, but not parts of a whole. Rather, they are parted parts that never form a whole. They are nevertheless composable, assemblable, parts of a non-uniform assemblage. They are inseparable, but only in the sense that they can be traversed and linked by dividual ciphers. The dividual cipher is the abstract machine with which the consistency of the multiplicity is created: (re-)assembling the components, arranging them through neighboring zones, traversing them, passing through them again and again, flying over them. Instead of counting properties, the cipher condenses, accumulates and composes the dividual components that have been traversed and overflowed. It has no location, no assigned place, no specifiable position. Through the components moves the dividual cipher, and it jumps, leaps, and connects across gaps.

What is the cipher in the context of control and in the text of the “Postscript”? A *mot de passe*. A password. Less in the sense of a collectively used military code, but rather as

² The translators of the book here translate the French *chiffre* as ‘combination’.



a singular-dispersed relay, interlinkage and incision of technological and social machines. And yet, there is always only *one* password; because no matter how often and urgently we are called upon to continuously modulate our passwords, it is clear that there can only ever be one password that, in each specific case, allows us to pass through and provides our access.

By contrast, the disciplinary societies are regulated by *mots d'ordre*. Colloquially, *mots d'ordre* are slogans, mottos, watchwords. But here, too, it is worth jumping back once again to *A Thousand Plateaus*, more precisely to the fourth plateau about the "Postulates of Linguistics". Here, my birthday is celebrated, or rather the day forty years before my birthday, November 20, 1923. On this day, the rate of the transitional currency was fixed in Germany to put an end to hyperinflation: from one day to the next, one German Rentenmark was worth a trillion Reichsmarks. Drawing on Austin's theory of the speech act, Deleuze and Guattari describe how this could be successful: precisely not on the basis of economic mechanisms, but as a sudden decree, a command which achieves the desired effect only on the basis of an arrangement connected with it and configured around it, an assemblage of enunciation: "The elementary unit of language – the statement – is the order-word" (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 76) – *le mot d'ordre*, ordering, commanding word, ordinance, directive, call to obedience. "Language is made [...] to be obeyed, and to compel obedience." (1987: 76) Thus, the *mot d'ordre* should by no means be understood simply as a slogan of everyday language, as nothing but a spoken or shouted watchword. "Language is not life; it gives life orders" (1987: 76). Transmission of the word as an order-word, an order, a call to order. Just like a teacher at school who does not primarily teach (*unter-richten*) and instruct (*unterweisen*) her/his pupils, but who gives them orders, molding (*zu-richten*) them and putting them in order (*zurecht-richten*). The point is not to misinterpret the order in the disciplinary regime as communication or information, but to understand it as a command-like directive, and then, behind or beyond it, the order (*Anordnung*) that brings the command-like directive into a certain, at first deeply hierarchical order (*An-Ordnung*).

The language of discipline is the ensemble of the *mots d'ordre*, and the numerical language of control proceeds via the manifold and mobile cipher: gatekeeper, who can let the man from the country enter or not, dividual map and corresponding city, which Guattari imagined, where the barriers may or may not open up. In the "Postscript", Deleuze describes this fiction and interprets it as an example of control-society modulation: "it doesn't depend on the barrier but on the computer that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation." (1995: 182) Access or rejection, whether it concerns information or the movement through your *barrio* – it is not in your power, not in one power, not in individual power, and this password is definitely no longer one that is simply remembered, entered, operated by the individual. It is a barrier-free, unbounded form of modulation, perhaps not necessarily a 'universal' one,



but a modulation that dividually passes through the individuals, traverses them and assembles their subjectivations.

A trace of Guattari's fictional imagination, to which Deleuze refers in the "Postscript", can be found in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* from 1989: the cipher – Guattari here calls it 'diagrammatic formula' – inscribed in Guattari's parking permit sets off the mechanism of the entrance barrier that allows him to transit from the outside to the inside (2013: 168). The setting here is still the parking garage with its visible barriers and limited spatial dimensions. In the fictional imagination referred to in the "Postscript," the entire city controls itself through dividuality and cipher: unlike total, totalizing discipline, an open milieu of self/control not only of what is, but tendentially of all possibilities; a plane of immanence of the urban spaces that, via the control of the future, also modulates the present; algorithmically open circuits of banks and databanks.

In his last book, *Chaosmosis*, Félix Guattari used the example of the credit card, whose cipher "triggers the operation of a bank auto-teller" (1995: 49).³ By reference to this now outdated and yet still astonishingly ubiquitous apparatus, we can gauge the obedient subjectivation that sets in when (or even before) the a-signifying semiotic machines express their orders to march and stop, for instance, when (or before) the machine suddenly demands unknown entries or even rejects the entry: rampant insecurity, not only in terms of the doubt regarding the recollection of the cipher, but also of the possibility that the deviation or rejection is based on one's own misconduct (or even on secret access to the data by invisible actors, be they criminals, tax authorities or intelligence services). Control regimes operate less by means of determination, regulation, limitation and shutdowns than through insecurity and the blurring of the thresholds between different movable objects, apparatuses, human beings and their body parts – in short, the manifold machinic components. This is also the mobility of the cipher of "'dividual' matter to be controlled" (Deleuze 1995: 182).

There is no question that associated phenomena of exclusion, but also of machinic inclusion and the associated, subservient, obedient subjectivations, have today, in times of an exacerbated algorithmic-logistic regime, taken on an even more obvious dividual-machinic character. Still, however, "[i]t's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the

³ Cf. also Guattari 2013: 63f. Here too, Guattari is concerned with the signaletic matter of the credit card, which draws money out of the cash machine, provided that the card's PIN number corresponds to the sequence of numbers entered, provided that the card is in good condition and the machine is not defective, and provided that one is not in the wrong country. Likewise, cf. page 89: Here, the example of the credit card is followed by the traditional one of a classical key, which in its fit with the lock also implies tolerance thresholds, ciphers between correct and incorrect. Here, too, a lot could be written about the subjectivations of those who tend to forget their keys, those who break keys, or those who despair in the face of new locks. But as soon as the hand and the corresponding body of the unlocking person become part of a familiar assemblage, it is the ritornello which becomes more and more relevant in this traditional example; the return, the daily procedure, which renders problems of exclusion rather exceptional.



best, but of finding new weapons.” (Deleuze 1995: 178) Namely, on the same terrain of cipher and dividuality, the terrain of numerical organization.

There are no dividuals⁴. It is not so much the individuals that have become dividual, but rather those foldings of massification and individualization which, in discipline, could still be identified as separate procedures. Dividual lines may be erratic, and yet they are capable of concatenation. While the number of discipline determines the position of individuals in the mass, the cipher can change its position. While the number of discipline is an identifiable multi-digit number, the cipher remains monadic and manifold. While the function of the number is the homogenization of quantities, the cipher distributes its multiplicity in a smooth space.

The number that has ceased to be a number, the cipher, is not simply a function of the control regime, it also “invents the secret and its outgrowths (strategy, espionage, war ruses, ambush, diplomacy, etc.)” (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 390). Numerical organization, numerical recomposition, numerical revolution, all this is based on the formation of special subgroups, special units, specific numerical bodies, war machines in the midst of the state apparatus. ‘Foreigners’ and ‘infidels’, even kidnapped and enslaved people, can, in the middle of the state, become components of a diplomatic machine⁵, a spy machine, a translation and negotiation machine. A dividual cipher, a mobile, manifold, dis/similar, subsistential cipher, which has the small tricks and pure means of the negotiator at its disposal. Numerical-orgic forms of organization, subgroups of negotiators, subcommandants, undercommons. In them and below them and around them, running and looking for a weapon and perhaps even running looking to drop it. Because no matter how armed and hard we may be, the war, the state, the enemy we face will always have been illusory (cf. Harney/Moten 2013: 19).

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translated from German by Florian Cord and Simon Schleusener

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⁴ Translators’ note: The term is here used in the substantival sense, denoting ‘dividuals’ as opposed to ‘individuals’.

⁵ On the “delicate task” of diplomacy as a “means of nonviolent agreement”, “without contracts”, “case by case”, “beyond all legal systems”, cf. Benjamin 1996: 247.



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