



## Affect and Noise in the Society of Control

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In his short paper “Postscript on Control Societies” (Deleuze 1995: 177-82), Gilles Deleuze offered one of the most searing diagnoses of contemporary society critical theory has produced. Three decades later, this essay remains remarkable for its prescience, especially when one considers that the World Wide Web was not in existence at the time that Deleuze wrote his essay, let alone smart phones and social media. Now that we’re beginning to understand the impact of global corporations such as Facebook and Alphabet (Google’s parent company), it could be argued that the essay speaks to today’s technological reality even more incisively than it did thirty years ago. Deleuze identified some of the key principles and logics at work in the emergence of what he argued is a new social formation, the society of control.

The principles, or logic, of control society, according to Deleuze, can be found both at the level of machines and their interaction, as well as in social relations. Especially notable, given today’s context and current debates on the impact of social media on politics, Deleuze points out that “control societies function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active, piracy and viral contamination.” (1995: 180) In view of that it’s not too much of a stretch to argue that had the essay been published today one would likely immediately connect that statement to Facebook and the general role of social media in the events around the election of Donald Trump and Brexit, as well as a host of other events. That is, issues of noise and contamination in speech and communication are precisely the focal points in today’s debates around the impact of social media and what is referred to as “fake news.” Indeed, the events surrounding the election of Trump, or the referendum around Brexit, crystallised even further Deleuze’s warning that the “quest for ‘universals of communication’ ought to make us shudder,” especially when he pondered on whether “speech and communication have been corrupted” and “thoroughly permeated by money” (1995: 175).

For Deleuze that shift in logic with control society is reflected in a wide variety of phenomena, including in sports as well as movement more generally. As he points out, “[d]isciplinary man produced energy in discrete amounts, while control man undulates, moving among a continuous range of different orbits. *Surfing* has taken over from all the



old *sports*.” (1995: 180) This observation recalls a comment he made five years earlier in a conversation with Antoine Dulaure and Claire Parnet: “But nowadays we see movement defined less and less in relation to a point of leverage. All the new sports – surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding – take the form of entering into an existing wave. There is no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit. The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘get into something’ instead of being the origin of an effort.” (Deleuze 1995: 121) Deleuze was again prescient in identifying surfing as part of the logic of control society. Two years after his essay was published, librarian Jean Armour Polly popularised the phrase “surfing the Internet” (see *Surfer Today*).

However, while for Deleuze the technologies and machines are clearly important in understanding the logic and workings of modulation and control society more broadly, he is no technological determinist. Indeed, what is critical for him, and which he points out in the conversation with Negri, is that “the machines don’t explain anything, you have to analyse the collective arrangements [*les formes sociales*] of which the machines are just one component.” (Deleuze 1995: 175) In other words, what Deleuze points to is that you have to analyse the assemblage that is at work in the formation of modulation or control, and in the formation of control society more broadly. What Deleuze is proposing, and it is important to stress this point, even if it may seem obvious, is that at work is the formation of a qualitatively new social form. In short, at work for Deleuze is a very significant rearrangement of desire.

What is crucial to Deleuze’s piece then, and which often goes unremarked amidst the debate about whether or not the new forms of surveillance technology are categorically different from the forms Foucault discussed, is the fact that it is an exercise in *periodization*. Indeed, Deleuze himself states that Foucault “was actually one of the first to say that we’re moving away from disciplinary societies, we’ve already left them behind.” (1995: 174) Whether we agree with the particulars of his argument is less important, in our view, than the fact that it explicitly proposes to draw a line between one epoch and another. Disciplinary society has come to an end and control society is taking its place. This is not at all to state that discipline does not continue to function. Clearly disciplinary instruments and techniques continue to have an effect in a variety of institutions, even if these institutions are in a process of transformation or breaking down. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that disciplinary instruments and techniques are greatly amplified in some contexts (Poster 1990, 1995), but also, importantly, that these often operate in conjunction with the new instruments and techniques of modulation.<sup>1</sup> What Deleuze terms *dividuality* is the twin product of discipline and modulation. The effect of

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis identifying the specific instruments and techniques of modulation as a mode of power, including how modulation operates both in conjunction and in antagonism with discipline, see Savat 2013.



on the one hand being produced, and producing oneself, as individual, and as having a clear and defined form, yet on the other hand only being constituted of particular, and dispersed, patterns of code, and having no completed or defined form (Savat 2013: 107-47). In short, as gaseous or fluidic of character in a way not dissimilar from how Deleuze describes the corporation, even if of a different order. That twin, and at times antagonistic, production is precisely what drives, or rather assembles, a whole new set of anxieties.

Of course, in stating that disciplinary society has come to an end, and that we are now in control society, Deleuze is also saying that it is possible to (a) define the unity of the composition (i.e., the abstract machine) of both disciplinary society and control society and (b) map the changing landscape of desire (body without organs) underpinning both disciplinary society and control society. In this respect, Deleuze's essay should, we believe, be understood as an attempt to begin to map the emergence of a new type of strata, one that is buttressed by the disciplinary strata that preceded it, but is nevertheless distinct from it. Strata should, in this sense, be understood as a problematization of a state of affairs (and not the state of affairs themselves as they are given); or, to put it another way, Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the notion of strata to transform a given state of affairs into a problem, which in their critical universe is the first step toward developing a concept adequate to understanding a particular state of affairs. In the brief conclusion to the essay, which principally previews the work still to be done, Deleuze makes this point clear: "We ought to establish the basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms as their age dawns, and describe in these terms what is already taking the place of disciplinary sites of confinement that everyone says are breaking down." (1995: 182) He might just as well have said that we ought to discover the assemblages underpinning and driving contemporary control society as its age dawns, because that is precisely what is meant by the phrase "sociotechnological principles."

But there is something else at stake here, already alluded to earlier in this essay, something that is very important, and that is the fact that Deleuze is prepared to map the contours of control society while it is still in a largely emergent and incoherent state. Control society is far more advanced in its development today than it was when Deleuze first penned his essay, and yet it is still very far from being fully-formed. The more we come to understand the power of corporations like Alphabet and Facebook the more we realise that there is still so much they could, and probably will, do to infiltrate, shape, and ultimately monetize our daily lives. Our point is that neither Deleuze nor Guattari – especially Guattari we would say – conceived of the assemblage as something that was always fully-formed from the first moment of its appearance. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of Guattari's writings is the way he treats the assemblage as something that can exist in quite different states and stages of formation. That is, the assem-



blage is to be understood as an ongoing process, as in a state of coming-together, which is important to keep in mind.

Symptoms of the shift in priority, in shifting from discipline to modulation, are not hard to find. Today education, for example, is very much at the forefront of this trend, and in ways that had not yet manifested clearly in Deleuze's time, though he seems to have sensed what was coming over the horizon. Across the education sector, whether it be at primary, secondary, or tertiary level, we can observe the increasing adoption of such things as personalised learning, data analytics, and adaptive learning technologies, as part of profiling students and constructing a learning environment that is continually modified – including tailored to individual students – in order to “induce greater levels of investment on the part of each learner.” (Thompson/Cook 2017) As Greg Thompson and Ian Cook argue, such new developments in the field of education “name a new logistics of investment as the common ‘sense’ of the school, in which disciplinary education is ‘both disappearing and giving way to frightful continual training, to continual monitoring.’” (2017: 740) As Deleuze noted, these new processes are also “the surest way of turning education into a business.” (1995: 179)

Whereas once we completed our training, then moved on and had careers, now we're never done with training and our careers offer only the illusion of continuity with our training. The downgrading, if not outright dismissal, of the “old” way of thinking about education as the acquisition of field-specific expertise is hidden in plain sight in such phrases as “transferable skills,” which are touted as being more important than content knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Students are told they don't need to “know things” anymore because Google enables them to look things up instantly; instead they need to know how to make things discoverable on the internet. That's the real measure of success. Ernst and Young's *Can the Universities of Today Lead Learning Tomorrow? The University of the Future* (2018), as well as their *University of the Future: A Thousand Year Old Industry on the Cusp of Profound Change* (2012), speak of nothing but “lifelong learning,” and ask questions such as whether universities can compete with Google where information is at people's fingertips.

However, as all teachers know, students who rely solely on Google to find information seem not to have any way of determining relevance for themselves. This, of course, points to a fatal flaw in Google's algorithm, which is only now beginning to make itself apparent, and that is its reliance on the expertise of its users to determine the relevance of its search results. If that expertise disappears, as it seems to be, then the result

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<sup>2</sup> And Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) already spoke to this shift when he described the emergence of databases as our new “nature,” including the consequences of that for education and a broader shift in focusing on the performativity of systems more generally, and in which knowledge would come to serve a different function.



will be precisely the loss of disciplinary boundaries and the resulting confusion Deleuze and Guattari (1994) warn us about in their conclusion to *What is Philosophy?* Consequently, we are witnessing, but not noticing, one of the profoundest dedifferentiations (to use Niklas Luhmann's useful word) of knowledge in history. Now Vice Chancellors, and not just self-interested external consultants, are asking their academic staff whether the university should not be more like Google or YouTube.

If these companies are collecting all this information about people, they ask, and the university already collects a lot of information about students, why can't the university be more like them? Why can't the university base a person's qualification on the sorts of patterns of data they generate? Students would no longer need to do assessments (i.e. their assessment would literally be continuous, measuring all their library searches, time spent reading e-books, and even their time in classrooms, amongst other things), and staff would no longer need to assess students, freeing time up for research. Precisely as part of such a shift to "personalised" and adaptive learning and continuous education, today we see the introduction of technologies such as Cisco CMX and Involvio on campuses, where individual students' location on campus can be tracked in real-time and with fine-grained accuracy, where their attendance can be automatically tracked, the data from their social media use can be linked to their student profile, and this data can, amongst other things, be used to identify and pre-empt "at risk" students, including those 'at risk' of dropping out, and, by extension, 'at risk' of no longer generating a source of revenue for the university, all in the name of student well-being.

As such examples demonstrate, confinement has broken down because new technology has facilitated vastly more intrusive and exploitative forms of open capture, as Deleuze (1995: 181) puts it. This amounts to a new iteration of primitive accumulation that treats culture – or, more specifically, cultural practices – in the same way extractive capitalism treats nature (Jameson 1991: ix). Google's co-founder "Larry Page grasped that human experience could be Google's virgin wood – that it could be extracted at no extra cost online and at very low cost out in the real world. For today's owners of surveillance capital the experiential realities of bodies, thoughts, and feelings are as virgin and blameless as nature's once-plentiful meadows, rivers, oceans, and forests before they fell to the market dynamic." (Zuboff 2019: n.p.) Consequently, we have become, in Zuboff's words, "exiles from our behaviour". This phrase articulates perfectly the epochal change Deleuze wanted to alert us to thirty years ago. We are no longer primarily consumers (i.e., individuals who exercise their judgement to purchase products and services), we have become the raw materials out of which digitally focused corporations manufacture their products (i.e. individuals), which they sell to other corporations interested in further repackaging us.



As Roger McNamee points out in *Zucked* (2019: 76), for Facebook “users are a metric, not people.” The panopticon Foucault feared so much is child’s play compared to the digital technology we are immersed in today, which is unprecedented in history in its capacity for surveillance. We willingly carry surveillance technology (in the form of our smart phones) with us at all times, allowing it to record our every movement, our financial transactions, our health data, and even how we feel about a wide variety of subjects. Not only that, we willingly pay for the privilege of giving all our data to private corporations. Companies like Facebook take the long-held view in advertising that users are the product to a whole new level. It makes traditional advertising look almost quaint. Facebook, as McNamee (2019) points out, in its collection of meta-data – the data about data, which is where the real value of data lies – can now target individual users to an unprecedented degree. Every action a user makes, what he or she posts, who they post it to, what links they click – including outside of Facebook – the people that might appear in the photos they post, and so on, enables them to manipulate the behaviour of its users to an unprecedented degree: “The metadata that Facebook and others collec[t] enabl[e] them to find unexpected patterns, such as ‘four men who collect baseball cards, like novels by Charles Dickens, and check Facebook after midnight bought a certain model of Toyota,’ creating an opportunity to package male night owls who collect baseball cards and like Dickens for car ads.” (McNamee 2019: 68-69) In using information in this way, Facebook, McNamee (2019) points out, can exploit the emotions of users to make them more likely to purchase a particular product or, indeed, vote in a particular way.

Such a level of data collection, as Zuboff (2019) argues, means that corporations like Google and Facebook no longer find it to be “enough to automate information flows about us,” to simply collect our data – their “goal now is to automate us. [Their] processes are meticulously designed to produce ignorance by circumventing individual awareness and thus eliminate any possibility of self-determination.” (Zuboff 2019: n.p.) In this way, as William Bogard (1996: 24) argued, what happens is that people and people’s actions, weaknesses, and strengths are known in advance – anticipated – so that they can in effect be “ordered,” that is, as Bill Gates is rumoured to have stated: “In the future [...] we will treat the end-user as we treat computers: both are programmable.” (Kittler 2006: 179) In fact, many of us willingly sign up for this, demand it, even in as simple a form as having targeted advertising or being suggested music, books, or hotels we might like. It is a form of control that at times presents itself to us as “choice” or as a “service,” but which is driven by behavioural prediction engines. In other words, we have shifted from disciplinary society where individuals are moulded into a specific form, to control society, where in effect the environment is increasingly prepared in advance of our arrival, and without us being aware of it. Where sites – whether they be shopping or learning sites – are increasingly personalised to anticipate our needs, only to encourage more “engagement” or “attention”, and to facilitate the occurrence of particular sorts of events. Ideally such events are the purchase of a product or service, the click of a par-



ticular button, the watching of a particular video, the posting to a friend, all of which in turn only generates more data. Even something as seemingly simple as photo tagging (McNamee 2019: 99), or playing a game such as *Farmville* (185), *Cityville*, or *Candy Crush* (191), is driven by manipulation, and produces a wealth of data about a user, including data about the user's "friends." The sense many people increasingly have that perhaps they are being eavesdropped when a particular advertisement comes up in relation to the conversation they are having is not because they are being listened to – which in the case of devices such as Amazon's Alexa and others they increasingly do seem to be – but rather that the behavioural targeting engines of companies such as Facebook have become that accurate in predicting behaviour (McNamee 2019: 219). It is in such a context that the computer designer becomes a magician, creating "the illusion of user control when it is the system that guides every action." (2019: 83-84)

As Facebook's infamous 2012 "experiment" on 700,000 of its users – to see if it could affect their moods by manipulating their feeds – demonstrated, digital corporations are both fully aware of their capacity to influence people's behaviour and unafraid of, or at any rate not morally opposed to, utilising this capacity (Rushe 2014; McNamee 2019). This became evident in the US election in 2016 when it emerged that (via the notorious disinformation campaign orchestrated by the now defunct company Cambridge Analytica) Facebook had played a significant hand in helping Trump gain the White House. Facebook is now one of the most important sources of news for hundreds of millions of people, but unlike the fourth estate of old – of legend, perhaps – it has no vested interest in ensuring that the news it circulates is valid and it invests no effort or expense in vetting the material it circulates. Not only that, it does not broadcast information as regular news sources do, it distributes it point to point, from one friendship group to another (i.e., from one milieu to another), without ever distinguishing between high quality investigative journalism and so-called "fake news." In the process it manufactures ignorance, as Zuboff (2019: n.p.) puts it, because it deprives the news it circulates of the critical context required to understand it and where necessary to challenge it. The internet is touted as a resource of unprecedented power when it comes to checking the validity of information, yet it seems it has never been easier for lies and misinformation to wear the veil of truth and fact:

In the open air, fake news can be debated and exposed; on Facebook, if you aren't a member of the community being served the lies, you're quite likely never to know that they are in circulation. It's crucial to this that *Facebook has no financial interest in telling the truth*. No company better exemplifies the internet-age dictum that if the product is free, you are the product. Facebook's customers aren't the people who are on the site: its customers are the advertisers who use its network and who relish its ability to direct ads to receptive audiences. Why would Facebook care if the news streaming over the site is fake? Its interest is in the targeting, not in the content. (Lanchester 2017: 3)



The dangers now are precisely those of “noise,” “piracy,” and “viral contamination.” (Deleuze 1995: 180) In fact, it is not simply that Facebook and other such companies enable the publication and distribution of fake news. As McNamee states, “[o]n Facebook, information and disinformation look the same; the only difference is that disinformation generates more revenue, so it gets much better treatment. To Facebook, facts are not an absolute; they are a choice to be left initially to users and their friends but then magnified by algorithms to promote engagement.” (2019: 243) However, what promotes engagement is precisely a deliberate push on the part of companies such as Facebook to ever more extreme views and forms of behaviour on the part of users:

When users are riled up, they consume and share more content. Dispassionate users have relatively little value to Facebook, which does everything in its power to activate the lizard brain. Facebook has used surveillance to build giant profiles on every user and provides each user with a customised *Truman Show* [...] It starts out giving users “what they want,” but the algorithms are trained to nudge user attention in directions that Facebook wants. The algorithms choose posts calculated to press emotional buttons because scaring users or pissing them off increases time on site. When users pay attention, Facebook calls it *engagement*, but the goal is behaviour modification that makes advertising more valuable. (McNamee 2019: 9)

It is in this way that Facebook, amongst others, has played an active role in a shift to a more affective politics. This is a politics where the affective dimension is very much dominant in ways that it was not before, and of which the events and debates leading to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as president, amongst a host of other such events, are emblematic. At first glance, however, Deleuze’s essay does not appear to say anything about this affective dimension of contemporary politics, but if one reads closely it can be seen that the concept of modulation he elaborates does indeed offer a useful concept with which to begin to think about this situation. As Deleuze predicted, most of the first world nations have moved in the last couple of decades from an essentially stable binary politics of the left and the right to a multidimensional and metastable politics of the centre (defined as an unwillingness to openly support labour combined with a reticence to openly admit serving big business is the primary mission). Political conviction has been replaced by a politicized form of affect, which gives the same political weight to inchoate feelings and emotions that was once reserved for reasoned positions.

As the 2016 US election demonstrated, workers today seem to identify with mercurial figures – like Trump – who in previous decades would have been viewed as both unworthy of office and a living symbol of the oppression of workers. In part this is because they have bought into the neoliberal doctrine that enrichment of the few is the key to the prosperity of the many, despite the abundance of evidence to the contrary. Class anxiety and the perpetual fear of downward mobility are undoubtedly crucial factors (as Naomi Klein [2016] and others point out) in creating the political climate in which



somebody like Trump could get elected. But following Deleuze, we argue these are surface effects of a deeper phenomenon, namely the destabilization of the old political hierarchies that once demarcated cleanly between owners of the means of production and workers, which Deleuze calls *modulation*, and which for him is part of “a mutation of capitalism” (1995: 180). This, Deleuze notes, many had already recognised was well underway at the time when he wrote the essay.

Deleuze argues that the evidence for this deep shift in political sensibilities is to be found in plain sight in our popular culture. As he puts it, “If the stupidest TV game shows are successful [and let’s not forget that it was literally a stupid TV game show that helped put Trump into the White House], it’s because they’re a perfect reflection of the way businesses are run” (1995: 179) today. In contrast to the old duality of management and trade unions, today’s businesses “are constantly introducing an inexorable rivalry presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against one another and sets itself up in each of them, dividing each within himself.” (1995: 179) Competition for its own sake is affect driven, it lives and thrives on the intermittent highs of transitory victories (e.g., employee of the month), and never concerns itself with whether or not these victories add up to something meaningful like a vocation. Indeed, this is a world that in quite significant ways, as McKenzie Wark argues in *Gamer Theory*, is set up as a game space:

Ever get the feeling you are playing some vast and useless game to which you don’t know the goal, and can’t remember the rules? Ever get the fierce desire to quit, to resign, to forfeit, only to discover there’s no umpire, no referee, no regulator, to whom to announce your capitulation? Ever get the vague dread that while you have no choice but to play the game, you can’t win it, can’t even know the score, or who keeps it? Ever suspect that you don’t even know who your real opponent might be? Ever get mad over the obvious fact that the dice are loaded, the deck stacked, the table rigged, and the fix – in? Welcome to gamespace. (2007: 1)

It is doubtless no coincidence that Steve Bannon gained his understanding of the affective dimension of politics from his days generating money from gold farming in games such as *World of Warcraft*, when because of the angry response of the gaming community to his gold farming he began to consider how he could harness that anger to more overt political ends (Bezio 2018; Green 2017). This is a world, and an affective politics, where mottos such as Facebook’s “move fast and break things” are not only celebrated as wisdom, but treated as an actual way of making money (McNamee 2019), as Ernst and Young’s aforementioned reports and their use of terms such as “disruptor university” (2018: iii) amply demonstrate. This is precisely the mutation of capitalism that Deleuze’s essay speaks to.

Deleuze’s claims about the transformations in capital are congruent with the broad thrust of David Harvey’s work, beginning with his landmark book *The Condition of Post-*



*modernity* (1989). Deleuze argues that 19th century capitalism was “directed toward production,” the manufacture of material things, but today it is “directed toward meta-production.” (1995: 181) Capitalism is no longer premised on buying raw materials and selling finished products. Now, “it buys finished products or assembles them from parts. What it seeks to sell is services, and what it seeks to buy, activities.” (1995: 181) Klein’s *No Logo* (2002) offers a detailed account of what this reshaping of the economy looks like on the ground to consumers botanizing in virtual and actual malls and high streets. With a journalist’s eye for the “scoop” she shows that apparel companies like Nike and Benetton are not the clothing manufacturers they appear to be, rather they are clothing purchasers and re-sellers of clothes made by textile companies in low wage zones (often this means so-called “third world” countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam, but it can also mean the inner third worlds – as Deleuze and Guattari put it – of first world cities like Los Angeles and Naples). What they make is their brand and what they sell is a brand story (as the marketing people say), which is not merely a set of associations that one might make with the objects they sell, but a kind of virtual territory one can occupy only by purchasing a specific commodity. Klein’s whole book is driven by a desire to understand how it is possible that people willingly pay several times more for a basic item like a t-shirt just because it has a fashion logo inscribed on it. If she is unable to answer this question with any degree of satisfaction it is because she relies on a model of desire that assumes that only dupes could fall for such an obvious scam as designer t-shirts. She doesn’t take into account the possibility that there might be affirmative reasons why they could want such items.

At the level of the machinic apparatus, the model of capitalism Klein (2002) describes is precisely the one Deleuze mapped in his essay – it is driven by metaproduction – but at the level of the assemblage her analysis lacks Deleuze and Guattari’s interest in the workings of desire. The important point not to be missed here is that the shift from disciplinary society to control society is a change in the structure and organisation of capitalism precipitated by changes in the collective desire of a particular society. Klein (2002) argues that the mobilisation of the logo enabled the dematerialisation of businesses like Nike, but what she does not explain is the changes in desire that enabled this investment of desire in the logo. The dot.com bust of the late 1990s, for example, demonstrated that digital technology did not automatically create the social and cultural conditions needed for the business ideas it enabled to flourish. In most cases it took at least another decade before people became accustomed to the new affordances the technology offered and trusted them enough to embrace it. It is hard to believe now, but online shopping once seemed fraught with all kinds of risk – largely of fraud – and many people were afraid to try it. Over time, new social forms – trust systems and the like – were engineered to enable people to feel comfortable with the new businesses sprouting like wild grass on the internet.



Capitalism invents, and invests in, the machines it needs in order to continue to generate and recycle capital, Deleuze argues, but not because the new types of machines that appear periodically are intrinsically better and more productive than their forebears, and certainly not out of any sense of, or desire for, progress (if that were true we wouldn't be facing the climate catastrophe looming before us), but always with a view to escaping the trap of economic stagnation. For example, the technological underpinnings of the popular music business have advanced considerably in the past few decades from vinyl to CDs to MP3 and beyond that to iTunes and Spotify but, at the same time, it has seen its revenues shrink dramatically. The paradox of the music business is that technology has undermined the very foundations of its business model, which until now has been premised on freezing content into a material commodity that is packaged and sold like breakfast cereal. But now that content has been volatized by the new digital formats and set free and made free to obtain, making it almost impossible to capture and control.

This is why, as Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), the flow of capital is always balanced by an equivalent flow of stupidity, which stifles both technical innovation and social and economic revolution. Big corporations are not unaware of the financial perils of innovation, though they are not always able to deal with the consequences in the way they might like (Kodak is the textbook example of a corporate giant wiped out in less than a generation by technological change). But it is not just corporations that are bamboozled by technology. Knowledge workers who are well-positioned to grasp the reality of their situations are drawn into a form of "axiomatized stupidity" by their attraction to their "gadgets," their iPad and iPhone and so on, which become "desiring-machines" capturing and curtailing their creativity rather than liberating it as the techno-propagandists promised (Deleuze/Guattari 1983: 236). Here we are thinking of the obsession with PowerPoint and Prezi that has swept through academia in the past couple of decades, convincing lecturers and students alike that entertainment is the key to education, and that banishing boredom is crucial if learning is not to be impeded (cf. Buchanan 2017). Such an increased focus on making education more "engaging," by making it more entertaining, is very much a response to what Deleuze identified as that "strange craving to be motivated" (Deleuze 1995: 182). Exemplary of this are increasing calls to gamify courses, which, not incidentally, is also part of a broader trend of infantilisation that Guattari (Guattari/Rolnik 2008: 56-57) identified in relation to that same mutation of capitalism. In fact, what better example of this infantilisation than the trend of having colouring-in books for adults, because it helps them relieve anxiety and feel more relaxed (Harper/Savat 2016: 65), or having giant Jenga, ball pools, or bouncy castles at university orientation weeks?

It is important to remember, then, that assemblages for Deleuze and Guattari are double-sided – there is a machinic side and an expressive side (Buchanan 2015: 390). The two sides are mutually presupposed, but also semi-autonomous from one another.



The machinic side concerns bodies (broadly defined as anything capable of entering into a causal or semi-causal relation), while the expressive side concerns the incorporeal transformation of those bodies (broadly this might be understood as the application of labels on those bodies). Zuboff's analysis of what she calls surveillance capitalism offers a vivid illustration of how this works. As she points out, what is particularly striking and indeed alarming about the new surveillance corporations is the fact they have created a field of operation for themselves that is essentially beyond the reach of law. The power they have "to shape behaviour for others' profit or power is entirely *self-authorising*. It has no foundation in democratic or moral legitimacy, as it usurps decision rights and erodes the processes of individual autonomy that are essential to the function of a democratic society. The message here is simple: Once I was mine. Now I am theirs." (Zuboff 2019: n.p.)

Deleuze and Guattari argue that this form of *self-authorising* law-making, which they refer to as axiomatic, is a defining characteristic of contemporary capitalism. This is the expressive side of the assemblage. The axiomatic is an unfounded rule; it is entirely arbitrary, it isn't based in law, religion, or any grounding form of belief. It just is, but it is also capable of transforming bodies by power of its declaration. This is not to say that Google and Facebook and countless other digital platforms couldn't be regulated,<sup>3</sup> which, for example, McNamee (2019) is a strong proponent of, because certainly they could; but it is to say that at present they are given extremely broad discretionary powers to define for themselves what constitutes right and wrong. The very fact that they ask us to agree to waive our rights to privacy, to ownership of our own content, and so on, in order to make use of these platforms, says a great deal about the way they are regulated. One may well wonder what kind of a legal framework allows that a corporation may invade your privacy and take your personal data and sell it for profit just because you as a largely ignorant consumer agree to it.

Still on the expressive side, control society has witnessed a dramatic change in our relation to machines – whereas once we were enslaved by our machines (discipline), now we are subjected to our machines (control); we are not cogs in a megamachine constituting a higher authority – the state, the church, civil society and so on – as we once were, now we are "connected" to a machine that no longer needs us to function (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 457):

For example, one is subjected to TV insofar as one uses and consumes it, in the very particular situation of a subject of the statement that more or less mistakes itself for a subject of enunciation ("you dear television viewers, who make TV what it is ..."); the technical machine is the medium between two subjects. But one is enslaved by TV as a human machine insofar as the television viewers are no longer

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the debate around Facebook possibly being fined 5 billion USD over its handling of user data, which investors cheered and some have called inadequate (cf. ABC News 2019).



consumers or users, nor even subjects who supposedly “make” it, but intrinsic component pieces, “input” and “output,” feedback or recurrences that are no longer connected to the machine in such a way as to produce or use it. (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 458)

Social media constantly positions – flatters – us as users, but at the same time depends on our free labour to function. Every time we post on Facebook or Instagram or their equivalents we are performing free labour because it is our posts that make the sites interesting and attractive to potential users (Fuchs 2011), which in turn creates an audience that the platform can sell to advertisers. We also give our attention to our devices and tell ourselves we are using them, even as they are using us, suggesting that in contrast to previous media forms social media combines the exploitative potential of both machinic enslavement and subjectification, making it a far more potent mechanism of “unfreedom” than anything hitherto witnessed in history.

Our response to the changing nature of our circumstances shouldn’t be to inquire whether the older systems were better or worse, rather we should be looking for new weapons (Deleuze 1995: 178). In considering this we should be mindful that the opposite of the society of control is not disciplinary society, which is its precursor, and, indeed, forms a strata within it. Rather, the opposite is the nomad society. This puts the war machine concept in its proper light: it isn’t intended as a historical concept, it is a code word for that which escapes and disrupts the dominant regime without itself becoming that which it disrupts. Here Deleuze gives an example of what he means by “escape” that four decades later remains as relevant now as it was then. No-one is outraged by the Vietnam War, he says, except for a handful of people denounced as leftists:

Then, all of a sudden there’s a minor incident, no big deal, a matter of spying, theft, of police and psychiatry, between one American political party and another [i.e., Watergate]. Suddenly, there is an outbreak, an escape, a leak. And all the good people who accept the war in Vietnam, who accept this large paranoid machine, are beginning to say ‘The President of the United States is no longer following the rules of the game.’ (2004: 279)

This kind of political about-face and seemingly manufactured outrage is an almost daily occurrence in the era of 24 hour news and the internet. So much so it is tempting to follow Baudrillard (1994) and dismiss it as so much falsity and noise, but that is precisely not what Deleuze and Guattari propose.

On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly speak against dismissing these “escapes” and vehemently reject the concept of “recuperation,” which is often applied in such circumstances to the effect that whatever appears to “escape” is automatically captured by the state, and more particularly by capitalism, and thereby contained in a political sense. For instance, nowadays no matter which political view you hold, if you express it via social media then that social media platform benefits. Regardless of what you



say, whether you support the left or the right, whether you take a progressive or conservative stance, it converts your attention and your labour into its capital (Birchall 2017; Fuchs 2011). As McNamee (2019) notes, the more inflammatory you are, the better you are at calling attention to what you have to say, the more the platform benefits. It would be easy to claim under these conditions that all political struggle is recuperated in advance and thereby not just doomed to failure but defeated before it begins. Deleuze and Guattari reject this view of things as disenchanting (1987: 463).

The fact that the state and capitalism have to readjust to accommodate these ‘escapes’ is proof that they are anything but inconsequential. But it also highlights the need to rethink revolutionary politics. Until now, Deleuze says, “revolutionary parties have constituted themselves as *syntheses of interests* rather than functioning as analysers of mass and individual desires. Or else, what amounts to the same: revolutionary parties have constituted themselves as embryonic State apparatuses, instead of forming war-machines irreducible to such apparatuses.” (2004: 280, emphasis added) If political analysts are unable to grasp the lurch to the right by the left’s traditional base, the large standing reserve army of blue collar workers and the unemployed, then it is because they persist in trying to understand political affiliation in terms of interest rather than desire. Similarly, the concept of false consciousness is premised on interest not desire – it assumes that if people can be made to see where their best interests lie then they will set aside their ‘misguided’ desires and act accordingly. But there is no evidence to support this view of things, as the ongoing failure to respond effectively to the slow motion disaster of climate change makes abundantly apparent.

This leaves us with the question of what is to be done? Deleuze offers some guidance in his essay. One such step is for us to continue mapping control society as a new type of social formation, that is, a new arrangement of desire. This is why he states that we need to identify the socio-technological principles of the mechanisms of control, which are quite different from the mechanisms and instruments of discipline that continue to be in a process of breaking down (Deleuze 1995: 182). Deleuze names and sketches some of these principles of control out in the essay, but there are others to identify and mark. If modulation, or control, functions in a similar machine-like manner as discipline does, then it stands to reason that it too will have specific instruments and techniques that work in relation to each other to produce the sorts of effects that we identify as expressive of control society. The instruments and techniques that constitute modulation, as well as the products it produces, can therefore be precisely identified and mapped (Savat 2009, 2013). Such mapping is one of the key steps of Deleuze and Guattari’s method of schizoanalysis of course; that is, trying to work out how the machine – the assemblage – works. In establishing what the machine’s diagram is, what its key components are and how they relate to each other, we can then more easily identify it and its



productions at work in the variety of new institutions – that is, the assemblages – that we come to inhabit, and that inhabit us in our day to day life in the control society.

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