



# Navigating the Coils of the Serpent

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## New Forces Knocking at the Door

The occasion for this special issue of *Coils of the Serpent* is the 30-year anniversary of Gilles Deleuze's essay "Postscript on Control Societies." The text first appeared in May 1990 in the French political and literary magazine *L'Autre Journal* and, in the same year, was included in Deleuze's book *Pourparlers* (the English translation of which was later published under the title *Negotiations*). In 1992, the first English translation of the article appeared in the journal *October*. Although the text has a rather odd standing in Deleuze's oeuvre, and although it is merely five pages long, it can nevertheless be counted among his most influential texts. With respect to the significance of the Postscript, one could well direct to Deleuze himself something he once said about Foucault: namely, that one cannot separate Foucault's books on the historical past from his interviews "that lead us toward a future" (Deleuze 2007: 352). What Deleuze means here is that these interviews reactivate Foucault's historical analyses in view of the present and the future, opening them up toward "lines of actualization" that require "another mode of expression." His interviews thus constitute "the other half" of Foucault's task: they are "diagnoses" (2007: 352) that connect his historical problematizations with "the actual" – "the now of our becoming" (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 112).

Something similar could be said about Deleuze's "Control Societies" text. Although the essay belongs in an entirely different category than his major works – books like *Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense*, or the collaborative works with Félix Guattari (most importantly *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*) – it nevertheless has an important place in his oeuvre.<sup>1</sup> Similar to the function of Foucault's interviews, what the Postscript establishes is an immediate connection between Deleuze's philosophy and the problems of the present – or, more accurately, "the new forces knocking at the door" (Deleuze 1992: 4). If the Postscript still speaks to us today, then this is undoubtedly related to this 'futuristic' orientation: the fact that it functions more like the diagnosis of a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, Galloway 2012: 513: "Could it be that Deleuze's most lasting legacy will lie in his 'Postscript on Control Societies', a mere 2,300-word essay from 1990?"



collective becoming or an ongoing trend – another ‘great transformation’ (cf. Polanyi 1957) – than like an analysis of the former status quo.

Read today, Deleuze’s Postscript thus seems to describe a development that is perhaps even more visible in our time than it was when the text was written. Among other things, what Deleuze underlines is the “mutation of capitalism” and the enforcement of the model of the “corporation” in all corners of society; the turn to the digital and computers – to data, codes, and quantification; the transformation of subjectivity (the shift, that is, from “individual” to “dividual”); the reconfiguration of the social assemblage of desire (its continuous “modulation”); and the post-disciplinary flexibilization of the mechanisms of power – a trend, however, that might facilitate the return of “older methods, borrowed from the former societies of sovereignty” (Deleuze 1992). All of this is still very evident today. It is therefore not surprising that many diagnosticians of contemporary culture and society – for example, analysts of late capitalism, neoliberalism, and the digital era – continue to refer to the Postscript and use it as a source of inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

### **From Discipline to Control**

Building on the historical trajectory outlined by Foucault, who argued that ‘societies of sovereignty’ were in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries gradually replaced by ‘disciplinary societies,’ Deleuze claims that another transformation has begun. Progressively, particularly since the end of World War II, a novel type of society has started to emerge: the eponymous ‘societies of control.’ Consequently, power is taking new shapes – a “new monster” (Deleuze 1992: 4) is being born, no longer marked by confinement, all too visible, binary hierarchies, normalization, and conformity but by “free-floating” surveillance, “perpetual metastability,” “permanent training,” and cybernetic forms of regulation and control (Deleuze 1992). Spatially bound, closed institutions – still crucial in Foucault’s account of disciplinary society – are significantly changing and, ultimately, losing their relevance as primary sites of subjectivation.<sup>3</sup> As part of this process, there is a gradual shift from the analogue to the digital, from the factory to the corporation, from signature and number to the code, from machines involving energy to computers, from confinement to debt, and from individuals and masses to ‘dividuals’ and data.

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<sup>2</sup> Among the various monographs and anthologies that have in recent years engaged with the Deleuzian notion of control, cf., in particular, Chun 2006; Poster/Savat 2009; Savat 2013; Franklin 2015; Beckman 2016 and 2018.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that contrary to the trend outlined by Deleuze, incarceration rates in both the US and Europe have in fact gone up since the neoliberal era. Cf., for example, Wacquant 2009.



Unlike Foucault's comprehensive picture of disciplinary societies, Deleuze's account of the societies of control remains a brief sketch – short but extremely dense. Its brilliance lies precisely in this density, that is, in the way in which, on just a few pages, it extracts from the complex cluster or bundle of transformations a whole number of threads that subsequent thinkers are invited to take up and explore in greater detail. In a way, the arguments the text assembles seem like *fragments*: points on a map that still needs to be fully drawn to provide the outline of a new *cartography of power and desire*.<sup>4</sup> These fragments effectively serve as injunctions, asking readers to complete or at least add to them. And this is exactly what has happened over the course of the last 30 years. In fact, whole books, even entire theories and fields of research, have developed from certain passages of Deleuze's essay, and in some cases even from single terms (such as the notion of the 'dividual'<sup>5</sup>).

### Media, Culture, Technology

The special issue at hand – the first one of two volumes – is focused on those dimensions of the Postscript that relate to media, culture, and technology. Over the last 30 years, these have turned out to be particularly influential. Indeed, Deleuze's claim that "Everywhere *surfing* has already replaced the older *sports*" (1992: 6) seems like the foreshadowing of a digital culture in which 'surfing the Internet' has become a ubiquitous exercise.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, the Postscript addresses the shift from the analogue to the numerical or digital, and the increasing significance of computers and codes, passwords and data, underlining their role in social assemblages that facilitate entirely new forms of control. Deleuze could not have imagined the unheard-of (ab-)uses of control and the concentration of power in the context of today's data-driven 'platform capitalism' (cf. Srnicek 2017). Yet, as early as 1990 – that is, before the Internet in its present commercial form even existed – he highlights the significance of "codes that mark access to information, or reject it" (1992: 5) and of "the computer that tracks each person's position" (7). More or less direct lines can be drawn from prescient remarks such as these to contemporary work on 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff 2019), the 'culture of surveillance' (Lyon 2018), or the 'surveillance nexus' (Schleusener 2019). Other aspects of the

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<sup>4</sup> There is an interesting tension in the text between this quasi-fragmentary nature, on the one hand, and the totalizing character of the notion of the 'society of control,' on the other. In this context, and for an illuminating take on the metaphor of the map, cf. Toscano/Kinkle 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Which is not to say that Deleuze was the first author to use the term. Cf., for example, Bertolt Brecht's remarks on his *Galgei* project as exemplifying the "conversion of an individual into a dividual," something he understood as "an historical occurrence of real significance" (Brecht 1992: 180; our translation). As examples of more recent approaches to the concept of dividuality, cf. Raunig 2016 and Ott 2018.

<sup>6</sup> In their contribution to this special issue, Ian Buchanan and David Savat draw attention to the fact that the phrase 'Surfing the Internet' was popularized two years after the Postscript was first published. Cf. <<https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/the-woman-who-coined-the-expression-surfing-the-internet>>.



Postscript have proven to be relevant for research on algorithms, social media, and digital labor, or for work on what Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson have termed 'data doubles' and 'the surveillant assemblage.'<sup>7</sup>

More generally, what Deleuze's perspective can be said to encourage is to examine more closely the particular entanglement of socio-cultural, technological, and economic factors affecting the emergence of today's 'digital capitalism' (cf. Staab 2019) as a specifically new mode of production. What the highlighting of such 'entanglements' points to is a significant element of Deleuze's philosophy: the commitment to not examine media, tools, and technology in isolation from the social assemblages in which they exist and are given a specific use. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Even technology makes the mistake of considering tools in isolation: tools exist only in relation to the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible. The stirrup entails a new man-horse symbiosis that at the same time entails new weapons and new instruments. Tools are inseparable from symbioses or amalgamations defining a Nature-Society machinic assemblage. They presuppose a social machine that selects them and takes them into its 'phylum': a society is defined by its amalgamations, not by its tools. (1987: 90)

Among other things, passages like these remind us – however much we are accustomed to characterizations of the 'pragmatic' nature of Deleuzian thought (cf. Bignall/Bowden/Patton 2015) – that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is in fact not merely a 'tool box,' but that the tools it provides are embedded in a specific philosophical and conceptual context, whose overall consistency should not be overlooked. In other words, while Deleuze's concepts clearly lend themselves to analyses of media and technology, they are also reflective of an image of thought that contests the idea of a general media autonomy or of a technological determinism characteristic of theorists such as Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, or Friedrich Kittler. To work with Deleuze in the context of media studies may thus sometimes appear like a balancing act: to avoid an all too blunt and selective application of certain Deleuzian concepts – as has previously been the case with notions such as the 'rhizome' (as a metaphor for the Internet) or the 'virtual' (as a synonym for cyberspace)<sup>8</sup> – one needs to take into account, and do justice to, their philosophical background. Yet, to not merely historicize but *reactivate* them against the backdrop of current developments, one also needs to translate and, at times, modulate them.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Haggerty/Ericson 2000: 606: "This assemblage operates by abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings and separating them into a series of discrete flows. These flows are then reassembled into distinct 'data doubles' which can be scrutinized and targeted for intervention."

<sup>8</sup> As an example of this tendency, cf. Pierre Lévy's (1998) study *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age*. On the question of whether it would be reasonable to understand the Internet as a 'rhizome,' cf. Buchanan 2009.



This special issue constitutes an attempt at precisely this balancing act: while some of the contributions mainly focus on Deleuze's philosophy and on questions the Postscript directly articulates, others concentrate on contemporary problems and developments, or use the Postscript as an inspiration to take Deleuze's analysis elsewhere, yet without ignoring its original context.

### Such a Strange Little Text

If we look at the Postscript in the context of Deleuze's work as a whole, we discover, besides the text's diagnostic precision, something else that is remarkable. Among others, Alexander Galloway has highlighted the way in which the text seems to differ from much of Deleuze's earlier work: "Such a strange little text, his 'Postscript on Control Societies' [...]. It bears not the same Deleuzian voice so familiar from his other writings" (2012: 513). What Galloway draws attention to here is that the Postscript signals a possible shift within Deleuze's thinking. As he continues:

One of the most influential aspects of the 'Postscript', particularly to my own thinking, is how it asserts so trenchantly that things are not getting any better. Computers are a curse not a panacea. Planetary neoliberalism is a boondoggle not a deliverance. The snake is even worse than the mole. For critics working in the shadow of the dot-com boom, such offerings from Deleuze furnished a welcome dose of fuel needed to combat the naïve utopian babble of the California ideology. (2012: 515)

It seems that this particular positioning – including the change in tone Galloway draws attention to – coincides with a rethinking on Deleuze's part of some of his earlier positions:<sup>9</sup> Could it be that the 'nomadic subject,' once celebrated by Deleuze and Guattari as a figure capable of undoing the striations of power, appears in the Postscript as its pathological double, the all-too flexible 'dividual' that is continuously engaged in acts of modulation and self-modulation? And has not the concept of 'dividuality' itself thoroughly changed from its previous appearance in Deleuze's cinema books – where its aesthetic qualities are appreciated (cf. Deleuze 1997: 14)<sup>10</sup> – to its function in the Postscript, where it signifies the malleable neoliberal subject, "a being who can be plugged into anything and everything" (Dufour 2008: 11)?

Power, this is one of the central arguments of the text, has evolved or changed shape, and what once, in the age of discipline, was potentially subversive has now, in the post-Fordist times of control, not only lost its sting but, even more critically, turned into a mechanism of domination itself – 'digital nomads' everywhere. It is likely that the ex-

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<sup>9</sup> In his contribution to this special issue, Andrew Culp argues somewhat along these lines with respect to Deleuze's changing attitude toward cybernetics.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, cf. Michaela Ott's article in this special issue.



perience of neoliberalism – and the flexibility and mobility associated with it (cf. Sennett 1998; Rosa 2015) – left its mark on Deleuze’s thinking, so that his late essay can perhaps be read as a form of self-criticism or, at least, of self-reflection. In any case, the Postscript can be said to, literally, constitute a postscript to Deleuze’s work at large, a supplement effectively calling for its re-reading, its re-evaluation, and, in fact, its re-historicization. Thus, when Deleuze famously declares, in the face of the transformations he underlines, that we need to “look for new weapons” (1992: 4), this injunction seems to be equally addressed to himself. Unfortunately, Deleuze, who passed away in 1995, did not have the opportunity to really take up this task. We can only speculate that, perhaps, the book on Marx he was planning to write might have gone in this direction.<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, the task of discovering or inventing “new weapons” – new ways of thinking and (en-)countering the tendencies that Deleuze’s unfinished map outlines – is ultimately left to ourselves. Several of the contributions gathered in this special issue attest to the timeliness and urgency of this task but, in the context of what Mark Fisher characterized as our era’s ‘capitalist realism’ (cf. Fisher 2009), also point out its difficulties.

### Coils of the Serpent

It seems only appropriate that the inquiry into the relevance of the Postscript, 30 years after its initial publication, should be released in *Coils of the Serpent*. After all, the very title of the journal is borrowed from Deleuze’s text. The reason for this is that the essay most succinctly suggests a periodization that is essential for the journal. As Alexander Galloway has pointed out, what is arguably one of the most important aspects of the Postscript is its emphatic assertion of the shift from discipline to control as a “historical break” (2012: 525). It is a shift that is related to a number of others (cf. Galloway 2012: 516) – in some cases closely, in others remotely – such as the one to late capitalism, the postmodern, the information age, the postindustrial society, the network society, the posthuman, or the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ (cf. Boltanski/Chiapello 2005).<sup>12</sup> Yet, unlike most of these periodizations, Deleuze, similar to Foucault before him, places the emphasis distinctly on the transformation of power. Despite typically being understood as a thinker of *desire* more than of *power* – or of *potentia* rather than *potestas* (cf. Negri 1991) – the control society is thus explicitly characterized as “a new system of domination” (Deleuze 1992: 7). Paraphrasing Fredric Jameson (cf. 1991), we might perhaps say that Foucault’s discipline represented something like the *logic of power* of ‘high,’ indus-

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<sup>11</sup> On this ‘missing work,’ which Deleuze planned to call *The Grandeur of Marx*, cf. Thoburn 2003.

<sup>12</sup> In this context, Seb Franklin has noticed a “frenzy of periodization” that “can only be understood as a symptom of an episteme in which the diffusion of exploited labor across the social fabric in the overdeveloped world and ever-growing rates of exploitation, expulsion, incarceration, and destruction in the fissures and at the margins of this world exist as features of a sociocultural-economic system in which the supposedly frictionless movement of information functions as a sovereign concept.” (2015: xiii)



trial capitalism in the so-called West or Global North, whereas Deleuze's control constitutes the *logic of power* of 'late,' postindustrial, global capitalism.<sup>13</sup> It is this general shift from the "burrows of a molehill" to the "coils of a serpent" (Deleuze 1992: 7) which the journal *Coils of the Serpent* is dedicated to investigating. It explores *contemporary power*, that is, the forms, mechanisms, and manifestations of power with which we are confronted today. The Postscript precisely raises this question of contemporary power; it both explicitly calls for such an investigation and is itself an (early, anticipating) contribution to it.

When we decided to publish a special issue of *Coils of the Serpent* devoted to Deleuze's text on the control society, the reactions of the authors we contacted underlined the text's ongoing significance. What we hoped to achieve was to assemble, and bring into dialogue with each other, the perspectives of renowned experts and those of some younger scholars to engage in a debate not only about Deleuze's Postscript but on contemporary power and the question of control in general. Indeed, there were many more positive answers and commitments to write essays than we had expected. The essays we eventually received cover a wide range of topics, all in different ways connected to the Postscript. We therefore decided to divide them up and gather roughly half of them in the issue at hand, which we titled "Control Societies I: Media, Culture, Technology." The contributions collected here address subjects as diverse as control and cybernetics (Andrew Culp, Daniela Voss), media regimes and technology (Ian Buchanan/David Savat, Jens Schröter, Dominic Pettman, Bernd Herzogenrath), racializing and gendering assemblages (Sabine Hark, Christina Rogers), control and the digital image (Elisa Linseisen, Tanja Prokić, Shane Denson), and the notion of 'dividuality' (Michaela Ott, Gerald Raunig). The other half of the essays will appear shortly under the title "Control Societies II: Philosophy, Politics, Economy."

These texts not only cover a range of different topics; they are also expressive of different positions and points of view. While some of the essays embrace a decidedly 'Deleuzian' perspective, others are critical of Deleuze or at least skeptical of certain aspects of the Postscript. What almost all of the essays have in common, however, is that they use the occasion of this special issue not just to comment on the Postscript but to also address the issues the text deals with in view of contemporary developments.

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<sup>13</sup> And similar to what Jameson claims with regard to postmodernism, we could argue that control is best considered as something like a 'dominant,' in the sense that other forms of power not specifically falling within the domain of its logic are always simultaneously co-present (cf. our discussion of the coronavirus pandemic below). In this context, cf. also the perspective of Seb Franklin, who conceptualizes digitality – with explicit reference to Jameson – as the cultural logic of "capitalism in the age of control" (2015: 168).



## Postscript: Control and the Covid-19 Pandemic

In the past, and also in some of the articles included in the two volumes of this special issue, scholars have pondered on the nature of the relationship between disciplinary societies and control societies (and, to a lesser extent, the societies of sovereignty), asking in how far the latter actually *replaces* the former, to what extent it can be considered as a *development* (e.g. an intensification) of it, and in how far aspects and elements of the two (or three) different types of society appear in diverse, historically and locally specific, variable configurations. Without fully entering into the debate at this point, we would want to defend against their critics quasi grand narratives of the Foucauldian or Deleuzian kind concerning the evolution of society from one type to another. Despite the inevitable risks of such periodizations, we believe that they are in many ways valuable as it is through them that we come to understand larger processes of transformation, to see more clearly the novelty of a changing conjuncture, and, consequently, to identify possible points of intervention. In other words, in order to navigate – and to transform – the present, we need appropriate maps. As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle put it, mapping “is a precondition for identifying any ‘levers,’ nerve-centers or weak links in the political anatomy of contemporary domination.” (2015: 8) At the same time, we would caution that the complexity and overdetermined nature of all such transformations and conjunctures must simultaneously be kept in sight. Hence, while ‘discipline’ does denote something categorically different from ‘control,’ transformations such as the one from the former to the latter are perhaps best considered in terms of *tendencies*, of complex and always unfinished shifts in the course of which certain elements become more pronounced, more widespread, or dominant, without thereby entirely displacing other elements, which have a different origin. The nature of the nexus in which these heterogeneous elements coexist must be determined anew in each (historically, locally, culturally) specific case: with regard to the relationship between the hegemonic, the marginally residual, and the emergent (cf. Williams 1977) – or in view of a possible incorporation through alteration, a syncretism, friction, parallelism, contradiction, or competition. Thus, while dominant trends can and should be identified, it is also true that ‘types’ of society or power are typically palimpsests or hybrids, to the effect that we never really encounter one homogenous, unified, and fully consistent form. Instead, we are always faced with a constellation where diverse, disparate elements coexist, in a manner that is not predetermined and, in principle, open to change.

The general discussion about whether or not, and to what extent, we (still) live in a control society received a whole new twist in the final phase of preparing this special issue for publication, which coincided with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Evidently, the measures taken in response to this pandemic again, and under very special circumstances, shine a light on the nature of control and its complex relation to discipline. If the ‘lockdown’ is understood to be a distressing, potentially even mentally harmful,



imposition on the individual, and if it turns out to bring about (or in any case accelerate) a major economic recession – one unparalleled since the Great Depression of the 1930s – then this reveals the extent to which both our personal identities and the societies we live in are marked by, and dependent on, precisely those aspects that Deleuze saw as key elements of the society of control: flexibility and circulation, the freedom (if not compulsion) to move, to participate, to produce and consume, to ‘undulate.’ It is not surprising, then, that a situation that forces the snake to slow down its movements, to stay put as if locked in a molehill, is experienced as a major provocation, contradicting many of the habits, desires, and practices we are used to under ‘normal’ conditions.

It is telling that many commentators of the present situation pick up Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* again and, in particular, consult his illuminating discussion of the measures taken to control the plague (cf. 1995: 195-200).<sup>14</sup> According to Foucault, these measures – entailing a meticulous partitioning and segmentation of space, the strict supervision of any movement, perpetual and centralized registration, and the order to remain in a fixed place – constitute “a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (1995: 197). Is it possible that we are currently witnessing something similar – a resurgence of the disciplinary society? Are we not equally “immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power” operating in accordance with “the utopia of the perfectly governed city” (1995: 198)?

While some believe this to be the case, we find the analogy to be rather misleading. This is not to say that there is no danger that governments might use the pandemic as a pretext to sustain or reinforce authority and silence opposition. In some instances, this has demonstrably been the case.<sup>15</sup> But with respect to the response of most Western-style democracies, the charge articulated by right-wing populists and conspiracy theorists – and also by some on the left (cf. Agamben et al. 2020) – that the measures taken to contain the virus constitute a comeback of the disciplinary apparatus or, even worse, of totalitarian rule, are more than questionable. Indeed, if we are looking for analogies to the current situation in the work of Foucault, then we will undoubtedly discover more fitting passages than his reflections about the plague. As Philipp Sarasin has highlighted, Foucault has in fact discussed three different models representing the various ways of politically responding to a pandemic such as the one we are currently witnessing: 1) the leprosy model; 2) the plague model; and 3) the smallpox model. According to Sarasin, it is the third model that describes, “more or less but nevertheless fairly accurately, the form of government in times of a pandemic that the European governments adopt, despite all differences and many national egotisms” (2020: n.p.). In his lectures at the

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<sup>14</sup> As examples of the tendency to reread Foucault against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, cf. Sarasin 2020 and Agamben et al. 2020.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Sarasin notes “that in Morocco the corona-related curfew is imposed with tanks in the streets and harsh military measures” and “that Victor Orbán in Hungary is planning a transition to government by decree” (2020: n.p.).



Collège de France, Foucault links the smallpox model to a form of liberal governmentality, whose “fundamental problem” is not “the imposition of discipline, although discipline may be called on to help,” but

the problem of knowing how many people are infected with smallpox, at what age, with what effects, with what mortality rate, lesions or after-effects, the risks of inoculation, the probability of an individual dying or being infected by smallpox despite inoculation, and the statistical effects on the population in general. (Foucault 2009: 10)

If this form of politics is less geared toward ‘discipline,’ its more immediate context is that of ‘security.’ As Foucault argues, a politics of security is not aimed at confinement or at “fixing and demarcating the territory.” Instead, its main problem is that

of allowing circulations to take place, of controlling them, sifting the good and the bad, ensuring that things are always in movement, constantly moving around, continually going from one point to another, but in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are cancelled out. (Foucault 2009: 65)

This description of the apparatus of security resembles Deleuze’s conception of the control society in that it represents a post-disciplinary mode of power that is directed towards flexibility and circulation: towards *controlling* movement rather than *preventing* it.<sup>16</sup> This seems to be a prime objective even in the context of the recent pandemic. The question here is how to secure and guarantee both the individual freedom to move and the general economic activity, yet without taking the risk of major new outbreaks of the virus that would overburden medical capacities and, eventually, slow down economic productivity even more severely.<sup>17</sup> The universal symbol of this approach is undoubtedly the face mask, whose mandatory use in public venues is precisely meant to allow “circulations to take place” but “in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are cancelled out” (Foucault 2009: 65), or at least minimized. Other measures, such as the widespread use of mobile phone tracking – the implementation of so-called ‘corona apps’ – or the near-universalization of the ‘home office’ – the most obvious site of the contemporary fusion of business and leisure, the economic and the private – are still

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze has expressed this idea most vividly with regard to the example of freeways: “Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and ‘freely’ without being confined while being perfectly controlled.” (2007: 327)

<sup>17</sup> Along with such political attempts at balancing out *freedom* and *security* in the context of today’s capitalism typically goes a form of ‘affective dissonance’ highlighted by Brian Massumi with regard to the media response to 9/11: “The constant security concerns insinuate themselves into our lives at such a basic, habitual level that you’re barely aware how it’s changing the tenor of everyday living. You start ‘instinctively’ to limit your movements and contact with people. It’s affectively limiting. [...] At the same time as the media helps produce this affective limitation, it works to overcome it in a certain way. The limitation can’t go too far or it would slow down the dynamic of capitalism. One of the biggest fears after September 11 was that the economy would go into recession because of a crisis in consumer confidence. So everyone was called upon to keep spending, as a proud, patriotic act.” (2015: 31-32)



more direct clues that, although some elements of discipline may be reappearing, we are not witnessing a simple reversion to the disciplinary society. Rather, Deleuze's concept of control seems to still function well as an umbrella term that articulates a number of tendencies that continue to be characteristic of the world we live in, even with regard to the recent 'lockdown.'

Yet, what the Covid-19 pandemic – similar to the 2008 financial crisis, the election of Donald Trump, and the Brexit – also demonstrates is that the system we currently live in is in many ways extremely fragile. This concerns the various democracies in the so-called Western hemisphere, many of which are facing the threat of right-wing populism,<sup>18</sup> as well as the global order at large, which, confronted with economic uncertainty, ecological crisis, and political turmoil, is undergoing a series of transformations. In view of these and similar developments (or bifurcations), it would undoubtedly be fruitless and reductive simply to use the label of 'control society' to reify a context that is ultimately in a state of flux. Nevertheless, it is our sense that in order to map, understand, and navigate the current transformations, including the emergence of new configurations of power and new possibilities for collective action, Deleuze's *Postscript*, 30 years after its initial publication, is still a valuable starting point and guide.

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<sup>18</sup> Speaking in a Gramscian idiom, should the ascending New Right be able to articulate to its political project the people's lived problems and contradictions entailed by the 'organic crisis' towards which we are apparently headed, it is well possible that, as Deleuze predicted, methods "borrowed from the former societies of sovereignty" will even more intensely "return to the fore" (1992: 7).



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