



Deleuze and Diagnosis: A Remark on the “Postscript”

JULIUS GREVE

University of Oldenburg, Germany

“More a physician than a patient, the writer makes a diagnosis, but what he diagnoses is the world.”

Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*

“Young nomads, we love you! Be yet more modern, more mobile, more fluid, if you don’t want to end up like your ancestors in the muddy fields of Verdun. The Great Market is your draft board! Be light, anonymous, precarious like drops of water or soap bubbles: this is true equality, that of the Great Casino of life!”

Gilles Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*

As Alexander Galloway observes in an essay called “Computers and the Superfold,” Gilles Deleuze’s 1990 “Postscript on the Societies of Control” is a highly unusual text, when compared to the philosopher’s larger oeuvre: “Such a strange little text” (Galloway 2012: 513), it is indeed very different from the earlier Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, or the Deleuze who wrote the two-volume magnum opus *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in tandem with Félix Guattari. How to read not only its peculiarity within Deleuze’s work as a whole, but also its particularity as a text that belongs to a certain genre? Galloway suggests the genre of a manifesto, likely due to its brevity, but also because of its straightforwardness, compared to, for instance, its author’s long passages on the philosophy of time in *Difference and Repetition* and elsewhere. While Galloway has a point when he argues that “one can discern here some of the most basic requirements of a manifesto, these being an enumeration of grievances and a sermon for how to remedy them” (516), I would like to trace the ways in which the “Postscript” may be contextualized in terms of Deleuze’s tendency – with and without Guattari, and in fact throughout his career – to write *diagnoses* rather than manifestos (the latter necessarily being declarations geared toward public action, the former being conceived as ways of



demarcation geared toward private knowing and only occasionally public engagement).¹ “It reads almost like a manifesto, the ‘Manifesto on Control Societies’” (514), Galloway proposes, yet it may be more apt to align the “Postscript” – this “strange little text” – with the best examples of what may be called Deleuze’s art of diagnosis.

Deleuze begins his essay by making a distinction in terms of periodization (another important point that Galloway takes note of). Referring to Michel Foucault’s account of “the *disciplinary societies* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” – societies that by way of an administrative and stratifying force in and of the social realm produced “environments of enclosure” – Deleuze writes that “they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth” century (Deleuze 1992: 3). Thus paying homage to Foucault’s historico-analytical insight at the very beginning of his essay, Deleuze nevertheless adds that “Foucault recognized [...] the transience of this model: it succeeded that of the *societies of sovereignty*, the goal and functions of which were something quite different (to tax rather than to organize; to rule on death rather than to administer life)” (3). Along these lines, pre-eighteenth century societies were based on necro-normative types of rule, while from the 1700s on the social realm has increasingly been defined by the forms of bio-political distribution, organization, and compartmentalization (there are echoes of Althusser’s state apparatuses here when Deleuze mentions, via Foucault, the specific examples of these spaces of enclosure, namely the familial setting or that of the school and the factory).

What comes after discipline? Deleuze cites William S. Burroughs as the author who provides the name of “the new monster” and Paul Virilio as the theorist *par excellence* of “the ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system” (1992: 4). One of the things that this trajectory implies is the opening up of the environs of enclosure so that, actually, they bleed into, or substitute one another: “Indeed, just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training tends to replace the school, and continuous control to replace the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school over to the corporation” (5). As in Burroughs’ logic, expounded in his more experimental works in the 1960s, control is simultaneously control of particular selves in the social realm and of oneself, in both linguistic and extra-linguistic registers. Accordingly, in an essay on particular social formations, such as the “Postscript,” the question of one period surpassing another (from *sovereignty* to *discipline* to *control*) becomes a question of the fate of subjectivity: “The disciplinary societies have two poles: the signature that designates the *individual*, and the number or administrative numeration that indicates his or her position within a *mass*. [...] In the

¹ We might ask, in this respect, to what degree the genre of the manifesto depends on, or presupposes, that of the diagnosis, on the level of the social and on the level of theoretical practice. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari’s work in the early 1970s might be particularly revealing, as it seems to oscillate between diagnostic and programmatic modes of thought.



societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a *password*, while on the other hand the disciplinary societies are regulated by *watchwords*,” Deleuze writes. And, creating a new concept (*the dividual*), as is the way philosophy ought to function – that is, by creating new concepts in relation to site- and time-specific modes of existence, as Deleuze and Guattari have it in *What Is Philosophy?* – Deleuze adds: “The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become ‘*dividuals*,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘*banks*” (5).

The political thrust of these conceptual pairs – individuals/mass vs. dividuals/markets – should not go unnoticed, and Galloway rightfully points out the (renewed) Marxist bent in Deleuze’s remarks (Galloway 2012: 514). It is this critical vigor that seems different in the wake of Deleuze’s books on Bacon or Leibniz, but which is in fact already there in spirit in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (even if the tone is different). The philosopher’s greatest fear at the onset of the 1990s seems to be the wholesale commodification of human (and nonhuman) modes of living and thinking. It is in both of these realms that the contemporary transformation of each and every former environment of enclosure by the dynamics of corporations had made itself felt, precisely, in the most “terrifying” manner: “*perpetual training* tends to replace the *school*, and continuous control to replace the examination. [...] We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world” (Deleuze 1992: 5-6).

The transactions between the conceptual pairings of individual and dividual masses and markets – morphing from *discipline* to *control* – go hand in hand with the increasingly accelerated revolution of media technologies, commonly referred to as *digitalization*. Indeed, as others have shown, Deleuze’s piece on control is precisely the “hangover”-report on what was happening when modes of discipline waned in favor of the fully digitized servitude by each and everybody in the realm of the social, feeding the corporations’ demands even – or precisely – when not “working.”² In fact, even if every type of formerly enclosed environment that Foucault’s genealogical analyses mentioned, in their thoroughly networked version, seemed to contribute to corporations at every minute, today’s social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others) have turned out to be the fiercely potentiated version of this scenario. While none of this is in any way surprising or contentious, but rather constitutes the scholarly and critical consensus, what exactly do I mean by “hangover”-report? Whose and which kind of hangover are we talking about?

When Deleuze writes that “the code is a *password* [*mot de passe*], while on the other hand the disciplinary societies are regulated by *watchwords* [*mots d’ordre*” (5), this oth-

² See, above all, Galloway’s (2004) early take on the “Postscript,” but also Chun 2006.



er pairing, only ostensibly less important when compared to the “in/dividual” and the “mass/market,” is one that recalls not merely the concepts of coding, decoding, and overcoding to be found in the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, but also the ending of chapter 4 in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari develop an idiosyncratic theory of language and its speech-acts, in contradistinction to the structuralist signifier-signified couple (or “mommy-daddy,” as they have it in *Anti-Oedipus*). The theory revolves around the crucial notion of “order-words”: “Language [...] is the transmission of the word as order-word [*mot d’ordre*], not the communication of the sign as information. [...] We call *order-words*, not a particular category of explicit statements (for example, in the imperative), but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be accomplished in the statement” (Deleuze/Guattari 2004: 85, 87). Now, in what sense is this notion of the order-word key in understanding the difference between password and watchword in the “Postscript,” published exactly ten years after *A Thousand Plateaus*? In the final paragraph of chapter 4, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of the “password,” alongside that of the *mot d’ordre*: “In the order-word, life must answer the answer of death, not by fleeing, but by making flight act and create” – put differently, these types of words make life resist, rather than evaporate. Deleuze and Guattari go on by claiming: “There are pass-words beneath order-words. Words that pass, words that are components of passage, whereas order-words mark stoppages or organized, stratified compositions. A single thing or word undoubtedly has this twofold nature: it is necessary to [...] transform the compositions of order into components of passage” (122). What I mean by “hangover” is precisely the sentiment in Deleuze’s 1990 “Postscript” or “P.S.” – itself a refined genre in the digital age, championed by the “constrained writing” of Twitter culture, above all – that the *ethical* championing of the “password”-side of words or things has not been as beneficial as it was deemed to be in the 1970s, when the second tome of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* was conceived. Passage, productivity, and nomad science – if the flexibility of individual lives, as opposed to the rigidities and homogeneities of the majoritarian order-word, still held some promise before the 1980s, by the time the “Postscript” was written and eventually published, Deleuze’s judgment concerning the promise of “components of passage” or *fluidity* in things and words alike has changed drastically: the (thought) experiment in nomadology seems to have gone sour.

The notion of “judgment” at this point in my remark on the “Postscript” is important, since it brings me to the distinction between the genres of manifesto and diagnosis. Galloway contends that manifestos are about accounting for the “grievances” of a particular situation in the realm of the social (or the aesthetic or the political), and about creating an agenda for the – at least provisional – solution to the problem, or what he calls “a sermon for how to remedy [these] grievances” (2012: 516). Yet, if Deleuze writes that “There is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it’s within



each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another;” and that “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons” (1992: 4), is this really about concrete ways to go about the grievances listed previously? Is Deleuze really saying, “the snake is even worse than the mole” (Galloway 2012: 515), when he claims, in the closing sentence: “The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill” (Deleuze 1992: 7)? Put simply, is a “more complex” situation a situation that is simply “worse” for Deleuze?³

I read Deleuze’s short essay on control societies as a diagnosis rather than a manifesto. The former, according to the *OED* the “determination of the nature of a diseased condition” and the “identification of a disease by careful investigation of its symptoms and history,” and etymologically derived from the Greek *diagignōskein* – “to distinguish, discern” – is precisely the type of genre even Deleuze’s seemingly apolitical writings adhere to. His writings generally have a diagnostic quality: sometimes they are discerning portraits of thinkers whose works the philosopher taps into and transforms; at other times, they are directly critical symptomatology of art, science, and culture in terms of the “twofold nature” of every “thing or word” (Deleuze 2004: 122): namely, the molar and the molecular, major science and minor science, the sedentary and the nomadic, and, finally, *order* and *passage*. There is yet another sense in which Deleuze’s work is directly linked to a particular understanding of diagnosis, which, in fact, is most apparent in an essay he wrote for the French newspaper *Libération* (published in 1989, that is, one year before the “Postscript”); an essay that recapitulates the theses of his 1967 book on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.⁴ In this text, Deleuze writes: “More a physician than a patient, the writer makes a diagnosis, but what he diagnoses is the world; he follows the illness step by step, but it is the generic illness of man; he assesses the chances of health, but it is the possible birth of a new man” (1997: 53). While Galloway is right in saying that the “Postscript” is in fact a strangely political text in comparison with his more somber philosophical portraits, such as *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988), this does not make his 1990 piece, which ultimately takes stock of the media-technological situation or (in Marxist terms) the “conjuncture” around the late 1980s and early 90s, a manifesto that accounts for pressing issues and then lists the ways in which to go about them. Rather, Deleuze’s likely self-referential ascription of a diagnostic character to “the writer” in his essay on Sacher-Masoch might be connected to the function of the “Postscript”: discerning the complex social and technological trajectories from discipline to control, and recognizing that the critique of arborescence – so powerful in the two pre-

³ Deleuze’s animist mythography is used to illustrate the passing from disciplinary society to that of control: “The old monetary mole is the animal of the spaces of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control. We have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent, in the system under which we live, but also in our manner of living and on our relations with others” (Deleuze 1992: 5). See, especially on this animist metaphoric, Bogard 2007.

⁴ See Deleuze 1997: 190. On diagnosis and symptomatology in Deleuze’s *Essays Critical and Clinical*, see Tynan 2012.



ceding decades – ought to be revised and refined. After all, in *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write: “The *diagnosis* of becomings in every passing present is what Nietzsche assigned to the philosopher as physician, ‘physician of civilization,’ or inventor of new immanent modes of existence” (1994: 113) – clearly one of the most revealing and crucial descriptions of their enterprise. If I noted earlier that manifestos are strictly public enterprises, whereas diagnoses are not necessarily so, the latter are nonetheless ethico-aesthetic acts: they have purchase on the ways in which types of knowing and kinds of living come to coalesce in a shared, if troubled space of “immanent modes of existence.” Philosophy, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the thoroughly and perpetually creative activity of discernment that turns to site-and time-specific problems in and of the world at particular points in time; yet it turns to those problems *for* a world outside of the apparatuses of both capture and (in)corporation. In this sense, a diagnostic philosophy in Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding is both an act in time and a process in the making.

To return to Deleuze’s indirect interlocutors: Galloway is also right in mentioning the close connection between Deleuze’s 1990 text and his portrait of his fellow diagnostician in the 1986 book, *Foucault*, which, unlike *The Fold*, anticipates the periodization from sovereignty, via discipline, to control.⁵ Notwithstanding Burroughs’ and Virilio’s importance for Deleuze’s thinking, it is indeed Foucault whose example Deleuze reconsiders throughout the 1980s in an effort to rethink some of the assumptions made in his own work and in the works written together with Guattari. Will the molecular always be on the side of resistance, holding fast in an effort to shore off the disciplinary enclosures of the molar?

One term, however, remains crucial: “Life,” considered as “resistance to power when power takes life as its object” (Deleuze 1988: 92). Power, in this context, gradually becomes synonymous with corporate identity and with what another diagnostician and friend of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari called “the stifling of politics by the insatiable quest for *self-improvement*” (Châtelet 2014: 65) in his unflinching and dissecting 1998 bestseller *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies*. Citing Deleuze’s “Postscript” favorably as an example of resistance in the face of “the generalized offensive of management and the managerial spirit” (146), the philosopher-mathematician Gilles Châtelet also homes in on the commodification of any vitalist tendencies in and by the business sector. He thus denounces the appropriation of philosophies of life by corporations, which may be seen in parallel with, or as a resound-

⁵ Consider also Deleuze and Guattari’s note on Foucault in their last collaborative work, where they write that “When Foucault admires Kant for posing the problem of philosophy in relation not to the eternal but to the Now, he means that the object of philosophy is not to contemplate the eternal or to reflect history but to diagnose our actual becomings” (1994: 112, emphasis added).



ing of, Deleuze and Guattari's 1991 critique, in *What Is Philosophy?*, of how marketplace logistics would hijack the philosophical practice – and ethos – of creating new concepts.⁶

And it is with a diatribe from the beginning of a chapter hilariously titled “Market Democracy will be Fluid or will not be at all: Fluid Nomads and Viscous Losers,” in Châtelet's book, which seems to evoke a Burroughsian poetics, that I want to close this remark on Deleuze's “Postscript.” This is because that passage accurately, and thus uncannily, gives voice to the anxiety regarding the social condition of corporations and the notion of their purported *psyche*, this “most terrifying news” of all (Deleuze 1992: 5-6):

Young nomads, we love you! Be yet more modern, more mobile, more fluid, if you don't want to end up like your ancestors in the muddy fields of Verdun. The Great Market is your draft board! Be light, anonymous, precarious like drops of water or soap bubbles: this is true equality, that of the Great Casino of life! (Châtelet 2014: 75)

The market democracies of the societies of control are not worse than those that came before them, yet, as Deleuze, Guattari, and Châtelet agree, the conceptual weapons need adjustment. This is also one of the reasons why the creation of concepts ought to never cease, cautious as philosophy should be to the proposals of the corporate world's “*gimcrack immanence*” (Châtelet 2014: 65). In this sense, once again, Deleuze's “Postscript” may be interpreted as one of the most trenchant demonstrations of his art of diagnosis.

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⁶ In this key collaborative work, Deleuze and Guattari reiterate how the philosophical analysis of what Deleuze had once termed “images of thought” had been taken over, or basically incorporated, by the force of corporate design. As they put it: “philosophy has encountered many new rivals” (1994: 10). Deleuze and Guattari then add (in a style that very much prefigures that of *To Live and Think Like Pigs*) that “the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the *concept* itself and said: ‘This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas men!* We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers.’ Information and creativity, concept and enterprise: there is already an abundant bibliography” (1994: 10).



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