



## Power Regimes of Control – Remarks on their Neoliberal Context

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In speaking of the society of control, new qualities of current social conditions are usually addressed in a diffuse rather than precise manner. Quite often, e.g. within surveillance studies, it is associated with technologies modelled after the fiction of god-like omnipotence of visual surveillance (cf. Gehring 2017). The relevance of a power of cybernetics – according to Wiener, the science of systemic control – which resonates in the concept of control, refers to normally invisible operations of technical systems that permanently evaluate data streams according to discursively determined parameters and in connection with commercial interests (cf. Wiener 1948).

The concept of the society of control was coined and popularized by Gilles Deleuze in an article entitled “Postscript on the Societies of Control” published in 1990 in the journal *L'autre journal* (cf. 1992). From a philosophical point of view, what stands out is that control is a power relation that is characterized precisely by its post-disciplinary nature. According to Deleuze, contemporary society is substantially different from the more historical one described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). “[S]ocieties of control [...] are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies.” (Deleuze 1992: 4) In the first section of the journal article, entitled “History”, Deleuze speaks of a breakdown of the institutions (of discipline: school, barracks, factory, prison, etc.), of “new forces [...] which accelerated after World War II” and also of the fact that Foucault himself recognizes “the new monster” of control “as our immediate future” (1992: 3, 4). The society of control increasingly displaces older forms of power, those of sovereignty and discipline – but this diagnosis in no way contradicts Foucault’s. I will go into this aspect in greater detail below. Moreover, the question of power also raises the question of points of resistance, since “liberating and enslaving forces [always] confront one another” (Deleuze 1992: 4)<sup>1</sup> – this aspect will therefore also be addressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Deleuze 1992: 4: “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.” It was again Foucault who localized resistance within the strategic field of power relations (cf. 1990). For more on this, cf. also Deleuze 1995.



This field of tension between discipline and control, power and resistance was the subject of a symposium at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts (HFBK) in November 2008. The conference proceedings, edited by Hans-Joachim Lenger and others (2010), brought together contributions that dealt with shifts of an economic-technical nature that are relevant to the study of power. In the introduction, the editors raise the question of “whether Deleuze’s break with Foucault in his sketch on the societies of control did not strike out subtleties and perspectives with which the latter had endowed concepts of discipline.” (Lenger et al. 2010: 14-15, tr. F.C./S.S.) I would like to turn the question around and challenge the idea that Deleuze ever had a break with Foucault in mind in the “Postscript”. For the analyses of power carried out by Foucault in the lectures on the history of governmentality can easily be seen as a concretization of a postdisciplinary *dispositif* of power.

At this point, two things need to be emphasized. First, in the lectures of 1977-78, Foucault develops a historical scheme that clearly distinguishes the power relations of sovereignty, discipline and security (cf. 2009: 16-110). They can be identified analytically as typical relations by accentuating their technological-epistemic differences. Their ‘logical’ differences do not correspond with the historical processes; rather, they render these processes readable by bringing into view the concrete overlaps of the different forms of power.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Foucault sees his lectures as a continuation of the older genealogical studies on bio-power. The *dispositif* of security, in its post-disciplinary setting, marks a new accentuation in contrast to the *dispositif* of sexuality. Although it takes up biopolitical issues regarding sexuality by focusing on the population, it conceptually breaks away from the conjunction with disciplinary measures. With the new focus on political economy as the discourse shaping the power of security (*Sicherheitsmacht*), a post-disciplinary form of power becomes tangible, which, especially in the lectures on the ‘birth of biopolitics’, is then endowed with neoliberal characteristics (cf. Foucault 2008).<sup>3</sup> In short, the analysis of governmental rule substantiates the relevance of bio-power – which sets in with the liberalist concept of *homo oeconomicus* – as a power of security.

Secondly, Deleuze’s text on societies of control is filled with implicit references to Foucault’s critical reflections on capitalism, in which he analyzes neoliberalism. This is perhaps unexpected given that Deleuze ignores these lectures and their themes in his book on Foucault (cf. 2006). However, it should be taken into account that he was aware of certain theses expressed by Foucault in his lectures which not least addressed his

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<sup>2</sup> On the choice of the word ‘logic’, cf. Deleuze 1992: 4.

<sup>3</sup> In the second volume of his lectures on the history of governmentality, Foucault deals extensively with the Freiburg School of economics and the beginnings of American neoliberalism.



own work and political attitude.<sup>4</sup> In any case, it is a fact that the specific power of control is explained with reference to the concepts of the ‘enterprise’ and ‘competition’, by way of reflections on a population-specific transformation of the disciplinary techniques of individualization, with reference to ‘subjects at risk’, or on the basis of a transformation of work (oriented on the concept of human capital) as the economic behavior of the ‘whole person’ (cf. Deleuze 1992). Perhaps many of these ideas were on everyone’s lips, but that is not the point. The connections can be made – and have been made previously.<sup>5</sup> My only concern is to situate Deleuze’s text – and thus the power of control (*Kontrollmacht*) – more precisely against the background of Foucault’s analyses of neo-liberal conditions.

Deleuze explains the logic of the post-disciplinary control regime firstly by declaring the enterprise to be the successor model to the factory. It is defined by a competitive structure, whose economic principles regulate economic policy activities, and it is based on power mechanisms that are understood as “inseparable variations”, as opposed to the “independent variables” of the disciplinary institutions (Deleuze 1992: 4). On the basis of an analysis of the ordoliberalism of Walter Eucken and others, Foucault had already linked the theory of competition to a generalized enterprise: “this multiplication of the ‘enterprise’ form within the social body is what is at stake in neo-liberal policy.”<sup>6</sup> (2008: 148)

In speaking of ‘inseparable variations’, Deleuze refers to his concept of the virtual multiplicity, which is the site of permanent processes of actualization and differentiation: a “continuous control” that “runs through each, dividing each within” (Deleuze 1992: 5).<sup>7</sup> At this point, too, a reference to Foucault’s text can be made, since the population as the target of neoliberal social policy has left behind the disciplinary mode of individualization.<sup>8</sup> In the “Postscript”, Deleuze formulates this as follows: “Individuals have become ‘*dividuals*,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘*banks*.” (1992: 5) Thus, sec-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. the Klaus Croissant affair and Foucault’s polemical comments on ‘state phobia’ expressed in this context, which built on the problem of power that was already a theme in the debate on the relevance of the repressive hypothesis (or the idea of desire) in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and extended it with regard to the conception of state and war (cf. Senellart 2009: 481 ff.). More generally on the Deleuze-Foucault relationship, cf. Dosse 2010: 306-30.

<sup>5</sup> However, the correlation of the *dispositifs* of security and control, or the linking of Foucault’s critical remarks on neoliberalism to Deleuze’s notion of societies of control are mostly very general and strategic. Cf. only Hardt/Negri 2001: 22 ff. and Raunig 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault also speaks of an “enterprise society”, whose “regulatory principle should [...] be [...] the mechanisms of competition” (2008: 147). On the ordoliberal concept of competition, cf. Foucault 2008: 118-21. On Foucault’s enterprise as a form of subjectivation, cf. Bröckling 2013.

<sup>7</sup> With ‘virtual multiplicity’, a concept coined by Bergson, one finds oneself at the center of Deleuze’s thinking about structure and immanence. It is important here to emphasize the mobile, inclusive and reciprocal character of structural relations, a kind of second-order normalism. For more on this, cf. Foucault 2008: 259-60.

<sup>8</sup> “Discipline is a mode of individualization of multiplicities” (Foucault 2009: 12), whereas the population is something completely different. Cf. also Foucault 2009: 36-37, 64-65.



only, control (*Kontrollmächte*) is characterized by altered relations between the individual and the collective: the population is nothing more than a multiplicity of individual enterprises. Deleuze speaks of a new relevance of motivation which defines modes of individualization in states of competition, or of a work continuum that increasingly perforates the traditional limits of working time and infiltrates leisure time, or of subjects at risk which “substitut[e] for the individual or numerical body the code of a ‘dividual’ material to be controlled” (1992: 7).<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, the profound “mutation of capitalism” (Deleuze 1992: 6) observed in the transition from discipline to control consists in the cybernetic power of information technologies. They are not unilaterally determining, but they “express those social forms capable of generating them and using them” (Deleuze 1992: 6). *Dispositifs* of power can be defined by the types of machines associated with them: “the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers” (Deleuze 1992: 6). Particularly in weightless financial capital the close connection with an information technology that is always on the track of fluctuations in share and exchange rates is confirmed. At this point, Deleuze expands the horizon of the Foucauldian critique of capitalism – or he adds another aspect to it, even if only with a few intimations.

It can be said that the sketchy reflections on the power of control (*Kontrollmacht*) that Deleuze puts forward in his “Postscript” express a ‘new spirit’ of capitalism. They summarize in a condensed form what in the following years will be more clearly formulated as a critique of neoliberal socio-economic conditions (cf. Boltanski/Chiapello 2018). The “Postscript” is at first an appendix, hardly more than a marginal note, which, however, succeeds in signaling with a few strokes of the pen a fundamental change in the social conditions permeated by the new economies. The text, then, is literally a *postscript*, because it addresses – to use McLuhan’s words – a new ‘electric age’ (cf. McLuhan 2001) which makes it necessary to think differential structures or smooth spaces in order to adequately describe the flexible power mechanisms that come into play.<sup>10</sup> This new spirit can essentially be based on Foucault’s lectures on the history of governmentality, which, with their critical analysis of neoliberal structures (of enterprises and competition, ‘vital politics’ and human capital), outline a contemporary post-disciplinary *dispositif* of power. As already quoted, Foucault, according to Deleuze, recognized “our immediate future” or “the beginning of something” (1992: 4, 7) in the neoliberal forms of control. Through them, “and no longer by disciplinary training” (Deleuze 1992: 6), the

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<sup>9</sup> With the ‘code’ or ‘cipher’, Deleuze refers to a character code that is based on information theory (cf. 1992: 5).

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze speaks of a “*modulation*” or a “self-deforming cast” (1992: 4) which establishes the connections between the power of control (*Kontrollmacht*) and structures that always differentiate themselves when they actualize themselves. It is therefore clear that although what is assumed here is a media linkage under the sign of cybernetic power in McLuhan’s sense, this linkage by no means already represents a way out of the problematic capitalist conditions.



markets are conquered and the social living conditions become thoroughly economized.<sup>11</sup> It is these ‘coils of the serpent’ that need to be analyzed, without letting oneself be hypnotized by fears or hopes.

*translated from German by Florian Cord and Simon Schleusener*

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<sup>11</sup> “We are taught [by Foucault, among others; M.R.] that corporations [Fr. *entreprises*] have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world.” (Deleuze 1992: 6) Power relations are relocated in the enterprises and are no longer organized around a center, “state or private power” (Deleuze 1992: 6). Enterprises embody modes of subjectivation that invest in themselves – e.g. in procedures for evaluating data streams, controlled by various algorithms – by fashioning themselves as creatively as possible for a future in which their investments will pay off. In times of overproduction, marketing or the selling of services functions as the “instrument of social control” (Deleuze 1992: 6).



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