



# Deleuze's Foucault

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## 1.

When in 1992 I published my first book, I knew the name Gilles Deleuze as the co-author of the wondrous *Anti-Oedipus* published in 1972 and in English translation in 1983. My book *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism* was surely influenced by what was then called poststructuralism; Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, all found their place in the book. Not Deleuze, however. Yet, it was also in 1992, after publishing *End(s)*, that I was browsing in the journal section of a New York City book store and picked up the journal *October*. If I read the essay because it was by Deleuze, I don't remember. But reading those five pages right there and then, in the book store, sitting on a small step ladder, would have a lasting effect on my thinking, teaching and writing. It seemed to me, as it did to so many others, that the "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (cf. Deleuze 1992) diagrammed the near future. It would inspire me to read more of Deleuze's writings, beginning with the cinema books, which were not then of much interest to philosophers or, for that matter, many cultural and film studies scholars. But those books propelled me into the study of digital media – electronic media, as I would have put it then.

Like "Postscript," the cinema books not only suggest that technologies are of great importance to understanding subjectivity, capitalist economy, and the state. But more they elaborate Deleuze's singular approach to technologies – that each technology provides "a theory of conceptual practice," as Hugh Tomlinson would put it in his translator's introduction to *Cinema II*, such that philosophical invention for Deleuze is not a matter of theorizing cinema but rather a matter of engaging "the concepts which the cinema itself gives rise to." It is "philosophy as assemblage, a kind of provoked becoming of thought" (1989: xv). Deeply influenced by this approach, I have been engaged ever since with the concepts which digital media and computational technologies have given rise to, especially the way in which they urge a conceptualization of the social in terms of use or users.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See my *The User Unconscious: On Affect, Media, and Measure* (2018) for my recent elaboration of the sociality of the user.



## 2.

When in 2013, I taught a graduate seminar on Foucault at the Graduate Center, CUNY, my introductory lecture for the course was titled “*Au Revoir to Deleuze’s Foucault.*” Perhaps the lecture title was only a note to myself, a reminder that when earlier in 2006, I taught a graduate seminar on Foucault, I had ended the course with Deleuze’s *Foucault*, where Deleuze traced the movement in Foucault’s thought from focusing on the archive to focusing on the diagram (cf. Deleuze 1988). Arriving at my last lecture to discuss the book, I announced to the class with much enthusiasm that Deleuze’s *Foucault* touched exactly on all we had discussed that semester. The blank faces of the students suggested that they had not had the experience I had had reading *Foucault*. “Whatever could Deleuze be talking about?” students instead responded. If, in 2006, students found Deleuze’s *Foucault* a mystifying reading of Foucault’s works, the students of the 2013 seminar simply felt no urgency to read it at all. Perhaps I felt the same: *Au Revoir to Deleuze’s Foucault.*

After all, by the 2013 seminar, Foucault’s late 1970s lectures on security, population, biopolitics, state racism, and neoliberalism had been published in English. The lectures offered an important adjustment to Deleuze’s treatment of Foucault in the “Postscript,” especially correcting the implication that there was a simple shift from discipline to control and not rather what Foucault would describe only as a “tendency” or “line of force,” “leading to the consolidation of apparatuses for organizing, assessing and investing populations in terms of biopolitical capacities” (2007: 108). Nonetheless, for the students of my 2013 seminar, it was Deleuze’s “Postscript,” rather than his *Foucault*, that continued to have a major influence on their reading of Foucault, especially in their engagement with terrorism/counter-terrorism, surveillance, security, financial capital, debt, work, affect, digital media, and computational technologies.

These, as Foucault’s late 1970s lectures suggested, were to be taken up as technical matters, matters of population, calculation, and network, already pointing to what later would be elaborated as the datafication of education, incarceration, family, and communication – all also sketched in the “Postscript.” In contrast to discipline, Deleuze focused on power’s acting to modulate access to information as a matter of codes, passwords, and data, and where subjects no longer are individuals but “dividuals,” snippets of statistical populations that are no longer masses but rather refer to “samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’” (1992: 5). Still, it might be better to think of the “Postscript” not as supplanting Deleuze’s *Foucault* but rather as an extension of it. In that vein, *Foucault* is a preparation for the “Postscript,” especially in its focus on the diagram. *Foucault* surely points to the becoming of a diagram different than the one connected primarily with discipline, a diagram which is further elaborated in the “Postscript.”



In Deleuze's nearly metaphysical take, Foucault's diagram is an "abstract machine," "the map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity," which "acts as a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field" (1988: 36-37). As immanent cause, the diagram is realized and distinguished by its effects; it informs not from above but from within the very tissue of the institutions, the forms and functions that it brings forth. The relation of forces, or power relations that constitute the diagram are "virtual, potential, unstable, vanishing and molecular" (37). While every society has its diagram, every diagram actually is "intersocial and constantly evolving" (35). As such, the diagram is distinguishable from structure; it is neither cultural superstructure nor economic infrastructure. It is not historical, although it makes history possible. Rather, the diagram is churning up forms and functions, physical systems, practices and proceedings, bringing new kinds of reality and models of truth into being.

For Foucault, as Deleuze points out, the diagram also is technical. That is to say, any existent but marginal technique or mechanism must be called by, or arise with a diagram, in becoming central to that diagram, what Foucault refers to as "crossing the technical threshold," becoming a (social) technology (Deleuze 1988: 40). Panopticism, for example, is a technology that operates "an entire micro-power concerned with the body," a matter of "infinitesimal surveillances" and "extremely meticulous orderings of space," "indeterminate medical or psychological examinations" that inflect the gaze of the state through institutions of civil society, such as the clinic, the family, the school, the labor union, the military (Foucault 1978: 145-46). Panopticism is the social technology of disciplinary society, which overlaps with the historically specific liberal arrangement that separates the state, the economy, and civil society institutions, the private and the public spheres in the context of industrial capitalism. If in *Foucault*, Deleuze would turn our attention to the diagram, perhaps it was because the liberal arrangement was being displaced in the becoming ubiquitous of networks, especially global digitized networks. Digital media and computational technologies had crossed the technical threshold, becoming the social technology of control – what Foucault, in his late 1970s lectures, called "mechanisms of security," characteristic of neoliberalism and financial capitalism.

### 3.

In his late 1970s lectures, Foucault treats neoliberalism in terms of rationalities that would make biopolitics intelligible as "this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge and apparatuses of security (or *dispositifs*) as its essential technical instrument" (2007: 108). Diagramming biopolitics, the lectures point especially to the way in which the 'natural' processes of economy became an internal limitation to sovereign power, more efficient than external juridical means, such as human rights. Yet, this is not merely a matter of



stripping the state of its functions, but more a full realization of what Randy Martin has described as “neoliberalism’s paradox” – where far from freeing “the economy to pursue its true expression, what was called deregulation, regulatory activities of government became hyperactive” (2011: 271). Or as Foucault put it: “So it is a matter of market economy without *laissez-faire*, that is to say an active policy without state control. Neoliberalism therefore should not be identified with *laissez-faire*.” (2008: 132)

This description of the state follows on Foucault’s earlier elaboration of the governmentalization of the state, as the enclosures of civil society, the family, the school, the church, and the union were aimed at educating or disciplining the individual, socializing them in the ideology of the nation-state. But in neoliberalism, the mechanisms of security, rather than educating or socializing the individual into the ideology of the nation-state, would control through what Foucault would describe as “formal competition.” That is to say, while the market functions as a principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and behaviors, it does so not in terms of a measure of exchangeability but in terms of a formal structure of competition, the underside of the liberal promise of equality. As Foucault argues, this is a society where discipline is no longer central; “nor is it a society in which a mechanism of general normalization and the exclusion of those who cannot be normalized is needed” (2008: 259). Instead, there is “the image, idea or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of the individual.” (259-60)

Or to put this another way, the formal structure of competition works beside the natural process of the economy, imagined as lively or vital. Here, as Michael Dillon proposes, life is to be understood as emergence out of contingency at the point where the aleatory or indefinite seriality lends itself to a statistical calculation of probabilities, as Foucault had put it (2007: 20). Life is thereby characterized by its drive to circulate in order to reproduce, to connect in its being open to combinatorial transactions beyond any unities, and to change without known ends, that is, to be complex. In this sense, life cannot be secured against contingency; “it is instead secured through contingency” (Dillon 2008: 315). For Dillon, then, security is an assemblage of mechanisms for measuring and circulating exposure to contingency, or what he refers to as risk.



## 4.

Focusing on mechanisms of security in relationship to exposure to contingency opens up Foucault's description of the economy in neoliberalism to what has become both a production and management of risk in finance capitalism, or the derivatizing of risk. As Martin has argued, derivatives seek contingency by securing the economy without insuring market equilibrium. In this sense, derivatives convert what was containable to what is dispersed (Martin 2013). They connect only the derived aspect of things and open these to a measured exposure to contingency. Even capital, Martin proposed, undergoes the derivative logic: "By abstracting capital from its own body, carving it up into more and less productive aspects that can be applied toward gain, aggregates of wealth making or terms of exchange (like currency exchange or interest rates), derivatives do to capital what capital itself has been doing to concrete forms of money and productive conditions like labor, raw material, physical plants" (2013: 89). This is all to say that the derivative logic of financial capitalism undoes what had been created in the aftermath of World War II as a configuration of national economies, which, by producing excluded groups of people along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, at the same time promised integration of the wealthiest and the poorest in the commonality of the nation, in the promise of prosperity for a national population. But, with the financialized economy, these promises have been rescinded and the system-metaphysic of parts making up a whole also has come undone, changing the relationship of sociality to the measure of value in terms of the "nonprobabilistic, embodied sensibility of risk." (2013: 97)

The neoliberal economy bases control on a probabilistic calculus, which Foucault described as unfolding in an environment that supports the circulation and mutual interaction of causes and effects; the pricing of derivatives through trading intensifies this mutual interaction. However, this puts measuring, as Eli Ayache argues, "beyond probability," as a process "supposed to record a value, as of today and day after day, for the derivative that was once written and sentenced to have no value until a future date" (2007: 42). The derivative "trades after probability is done with and (the context) saturated" (41). When the context is saturated with all its possibilities, it opens up to what Ayache calls "capacity" that allows for the context to be changed (42). Pricing through trading "is a revision of the whole range of possibilities, not just of the probability distribution overlying them." For Ayache, this means "putting into play the parameter (or parameters) whose fixity was (supposed to be) the guarantee of fixity of the context and of the corresponding dynamic replication within a context" (44). With that fixity or context undone or put into play with each and every trade, measuring is no longer about calculating the future by means of pre-set probabilities.

This change in parameters, necessary to derivative trading, points to the working of algorithms that now produce and parse massive amounts of data, while reprogramming



their parameters, changing the rules of their operation in real time – what is called machine learning. The algorithms of datafication depend on contingency, on the indeterminism of the incomputable immanent to their working by which new algorithmic behavior or a growth of information beyond beginning instructions is made possible. The computational technologies of the algorithm constitute a form of measure that is itself productive of contingency in the growth of information, giving a further elaboration of what Deleuze described in the “Postscript” as modulation or a “self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (1992: 4). As the contingency, which is let loose in the neoliberal financial economy, becomes immanent to the computational technologies themselves, the diagram of security or control seems to be fully realized while opening to something beyond itself in the becoming of another diagram.

Perhaps, Benjamin Bratton offers a sketch of the diagram of computational technologies of security or control beyond control in what he calls “The Stack.” This is a design model for thinking about the technical arrangement of layers and layers of computing assemblaging human and other-than-human agencies or “users,” as Bratton refers to these assemblages. Not only does the Stack challenge the political geography of nation-states, at a time when the state has never been “more entrenched and ubiquitous and never more obsolete and brittle” (Bratton 2015: 6). It does so through its many layers of computing that interiorize or take over some of the functions of the state and the work of governance, as various layers of computing bind politics to themselves, addressing every agency as users, making being a user what counts (2015: 10). As the use of data is socially mediated in that users’ data are accessed, identified, and measured by the very mechanisms that users already are using, the use of data necessarily makes users inextricable from their data, and the data of many other users, including other-than-human users or agents. As Bratton sees it, the Stack does not put technology into sociality; rather, it has become “the armature of the social itself” (2015: xviii). As such, the user is the fully interiorized outside of the diagram of control.

And all of this barely touches on, although it leans heavily upon, the “three quarters of humanity too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement” (Deleuze 1992: 6) – even as there continue to be efforts to lure them into debt and force them into confinement. Deleuze hoped that “new weapons” (1992: 4) beyond hope or fear would be found, and perhaps he imagined that they would arise in those spaces outside debt and among those resistant to confinement. But wouldn’t there now be a need also to address those spaces occupied by users?



## 5.

Deleuze closes his study of the shift in Foucault's work from the archive to the diagram with a consideration of the outside of the outside, maybe too affirmative a conclusion for Foucault; maybe not yet fully facing what would be the full realization of the diagram only pointed to in the "Postscript." Nonetheless, what Deleuze proposes about the outside of the outside gives weight and extension to the profession of criticism that would respect that understanding of power which is Foucault's legacy: "Forces come from the outside, from an outside that is farther away than any form of exteriority. So there are not only particular features taken up by the relations between forces, but particular features of resistance that are apt to modify and overturn these relations and to change the unstable diagram." (Deleuze 1988: 122)

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