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Architecture and control society

We're told businesses have souls, which is surely the most terrifying news in the world (Deleuze, 1995: 181).

This audio includes the symposium keynote talk recorded on 18 July 2019 in addition to an interview with Ian Buchanan in December 2019.

The influence of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) in the humanities and social sciences cannot be overstated. Its two core essentially architectural theses, that (a) sites of confinement and (b) practices of surveillance define our era, are largely treated as both factually correct and inarguably true.

In the four decades since its publication, the consensus view seems to be that evidence of the continuing pertinence of Foucault's theses can be seen with the naked eye in the built environment of practically every city in the world. However, while it is true that sites of confinement are proliferating (there are literally more prisons today than there were when Foucault wrote his book) and practices of surveillance have attained a level of intrusiveness and scrutiny that Foucault himself (a gloomy pessimist on this issue) could not have imagined, that does not mean our age is unchanged from the one Foucault documented.

In his essay "Postscript on Control Societies", *Post-Scriptum sur les Sociétés des Contrôle*, Gilles Deleuze (1995) argues that contrary to appearances, things have indeed changed—sites of confinement are breaking down even as they are proliferating, and surveillance practices, although they have increased in intensity, no longer follow the old pattern. This is testament to the extent to which Foucault is seen to have grasped something essential about our time.

Deleuze's challenges to the received status of Foucault's theses have either been ignored or simply batted away as mistaken because, to put it bluntly, any fool can see that sites of confinement and practices of surveillance are as much a part of today's society as they were in Foucault's time, if not more so. In what follows, I want to suggest, firstly, that this response is wrong inasmuch as it stems from a misreading of both Foucault and Deleuze, and secondly, that it is a missed

opportunity to cast a weathering eye over our current situation, and more particularly the state of contemporary architecture.

My real starting point, though, is the observation that when you read Foucault and Deleuze side-by-side, there is an obvious gap in Deleuze's essay. While Deleuze argues against the view that the architectural categories of confinement and surveillance are the defining categories of our era, he offers no thoughts on the transformations the built environment has undergone since the disciplinary forms Foucault identified began to break down. The question that interests me, then, is precisely the one Deleuze neglects to ask: has control society given rise to its own architectural forms?

I use form here in the sense that it has in literary studies (my background), where it refers to precisely defined discursive entities like novels and poems, which nevertheless remain open to considerable variation. There are, however, real limits to this variation: there is a point at which a novel ceases to be a novel and becomes either meaningless gibberish or a poem or a play. The forms themselves have their own history—the novel in the eighteenth century is quite different from the novel of the twenty-first century, both in terms of the language used, but also the formal structure. Wholly new forms are rare, and most often they are permutations of existing forms that are "strong" enough in their own right to be counted as new.

In order to answer the question of whether control society has yielded new architectural forms, I will try to do two things—I will briefly explain how (according to Deleuze) control society differs from disciplinary society; then I will try to determine which (if any) new architectural forms have arisen in the transition from discipline to control. I will go through the specific empirical differences between the two modalities in more detail below, but first I want to spell out the main conceptual difference because it appears from the arguments against Deleuze that this is not generally well understood (it is often Foucault as much as it is Deleuze who is misunderstood).

The key to both of their positions is this: discipline concerned *the correct training and placement of individuals*, whereas control is concerned with *the maximum exploitation of what Deleuze calls dividuals* (nameless, faceless, data points), regardless of their formation or placement. So, while it is true that sites of confinement and practices of surveillance continue to shape contemporary existence, *they do not function in the same way* as they did in disciplinary society.

The title of Deleuze's essay offers a useful, albeit cryptic clue as to how it should be read, because while he titled it "Postscript on Control Societies", he did not specify what it is a post-script to. The fact it is appended to his book *Negotiations* (1995) makes it seem it was intended as a discursive addition to a collection of his interviews, but I think this is just a matter of publishing convenience. It had already appeared in *L'autre Journal* (1990), so it clearly wasn't written solely for the occasion of his book. In my view, it makes more sense to read it as a postscript to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and not his own book, because its aim is quite obviously to speculate about what his friend might have said, were he still alive to write it himself.

This is not an idea I'm going to try to defend with either biographical or bibliographical information, though I will note that Dosse (2010: 330) gestures in this

direction, without putting it in so many words, in his biography of Deleuze and Guattari. I merely offer it as thought experiment (if you will) that reframes the way we think about the relation between the two pieces of work, which despite their differences cannot really be thought in antagonistic or polemical terms.

Deleuze's essay functions more as a continuation of Foucault's book than a critique, albeit a continuation that begins by drawing a definitive line under what went before. One could say that it is tributary in both senses of the word—it flows from Foucault as the original source, and it is offered in homage to a great thinker. It is important to stress, too, that Deleuze does not claim that Foucault is wrong, or in error; his claim is that during the course of the twentieth century the world entered a new era, one that is organised differently from disciplinary society, and he insists that Foucault himself knew this and was already saying that the disciplinary society he had written about had ended and that a new kind of society was emerging to take its place. As Deleuze describes:

> Foucault has thoroughly analysed the ideal behind sites of confinement, clearly seen in the factory: bringing everything together, giving each thing its place, organising time, setting up in this space-time a force of production greater than the sum of component forces. But Foucault knew how short-lived this model was: it succeeded sovereign societies with an altogether different aim and operation (taking a cut of production instead of organizing it, condemning to death instead of ordering life); the transition took place gradually […] But discipline would in its turn begin to break down as new forces moved slowly into place, then made rapid advances after the Second World War: we were no longer in disciplinary societies, we were leaving them behind. (1995: 177-178)

In a more critical voice, Byung-Chul Han (2017: 23) agrees that Foucault "recognized that disciplinary society did not reflect the times in every respect", which is why he turned to questions of biopolitics and population (which are implicitly post-disciplinary in their construction). In doing so, however, he failed to grasp what is distinctive about neoliberalism in Han's view because in contrast to biopolitics, neoliberalism "is not primarily concerned with 'the biological, the somatic, the corporal'. It has discovered the psyche as a productive force" (2017: 25).

Here I think one can agree with the conclusion, that neoliberalism is focused on the psyche, without necessarily accepting the premise, because it is false to say that biopolitics concerns the body in the same way discipline did. As Agamben (2000) has clarified, biopolitics is interested only in the bare fact of life itself, not the body.[1]

Its aim and function is to reduce the subject not merely to a body, but to a set of attributes that can be quantified and ranked (Agamben, 2000: 7-8). Public health campaigns targeting obesity, to take a contemporary example of biopolitics in action, are not concerned with whether or not bodies are fat or thin, but only whether they are at increased risk (which is calculated statistically rather than by any actual assessment of actual bodies) of particular diseases, which are expensive to treat (Berlant, 2011: 106-114). As Deleuze (1995: 182) puts it, the new medicine will have neither doctors nor patients, just cases and subjects at risk.

I mention Han (2017) here because despite his misdirected criticisms of Foucault and Agamben, his theses are not only compatible with Deleuze's account of

control society, they update and clarify Deleuze's insights in a number of quite useful ways. He argues persuasively that our situation now is very different from disciplinary society because: (a) it concerns the psyche rather than the body—it is our imagination not our body that is subject to capture; (b) it is permissive rather than inhibitive—we are constantly exhorted to be "ourselves"; (c) the panopticon is perspectival—it relies on an embodied viewer, whereas control does not (it sees patterns not people); (d) disciplinary society lacked the means of keeping records, whereas control society records everything, down to the most trivial; and lastly (e), it is business rather than the state that controls surveillance (Han, 2017: 25; 14; 56; 62; 65).

It is surprising, therefore, that even though he acknowledges Deleuze's concept of control, he does not embrace it in his account of the effects of contemporary forms of surveillance, but instead speaks of it as a form of digital panopticon (Han, 2017: 38). This is a regressive step, it seems to me, because it blurs the very distinction he—and more importantly Deleuze—is trying to make between two very different specular regimes. In point of fact, as Han seems to be aware, the panopticon is child's play compared to the digital technology we are immersed in today, and which is unprecedented in history in its surveillance capacity.

In disciplinary society, surveillance was coercive, hence the need for confinement, but today we willingly carry surveillance technology (as Han notes) with us at all times, allowing it to record our every movement, our conversations, 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 (Zuboff, 2019). This is the true face of control society. We have entered an era in which surveillance is desired rather than feared and privacy has lost most, if not all, its meaning as an organising concern.

One key difference between Foucault and Deleuze, which is essential to understanding the latter's formulation of control society, is that whereas Foucault tended to shy away from speaking directly about capitalism, Deleuze did not. Control society is explicitly defined as a mutation in capitalism:

> nineteenth-century capitalism was concentrative, directed toward production, and proprietorial. Thus it made the factory into a site of confinement, with the capitalist owning the means of production [...] But capitalism in its present form is no longer directed toward production [...] It is directed toward metaproduction [...] Thus it is essentially dispersive, with factories giving way to businesses. (Deleuze, 1995: 180-181)[2]

I would argue Deleuze does not go far enough here in his account of the transformation of capitalism, and he doesn't adhere closely enough to his own insights. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), he and Guattari complain that not enough importance is attributed "to banking practice, to financial operations, and to the specific circulation of credit money which would be the meaning of a return to Marx, to the Marxist theory of money" (230). Deleuze's essay is guilty of the same failing, inasmuch as he focuses on changes to manufacturing—the shift from production to metaproduction, which can be grasped simply as the movement away from in-house production towards outsourcing, and even more so as the shift from local production to offshoring—rather than changes to the structures of ownership, which are more far-reaching in their effects. Today, corporations are owned by shareholders, those shareholders are very often other corporations such as hedge

funds and pension funds that are themselves owned by shareholders who purchased the shares using money borrowed from credit institutions. What matters now is not who owns the means of production (the pivotal factor in Marx's analyses), but rather who controls the platforms (Srnicek, 2017).[3] Ours is the age of bankers, derivatives, hedge funds, and debt, but above all it is the age of data and its crucial complement the algorithm.

Deleuze identified three paradigmatic differences between disciplinary society and control society:

(1) *Confinement is an analogical system, whereas control is digital.* In disciplinary societies, one is constantly starting over, as one moves from school to the army to work and so on, but in control societies, one is never finished—lifelong learning has replaced the idea of graduation with a perpetual cycle of training. In disciplinary society, school, the army, the factory, were analogous, inasmuch as they were organised along similar lines and according to similar principles but remained essentially different—the student was not a soldier, the soldier was not a worker, and so on. But in control society, the school, the army, and the factory, along with virtually every other aspect of society, have become businesses, measured in terms of their financial bottom lines rather than their outputs. Success in education, to take only one example, is measured in economic not pedagogic terms. What matters is not whether the student has learned their curriculum and graduated with specific capabilities and genuine expertise, but whether that curriculum was delivered in a cost-efficient manner and according to protocols recommended by employers.

(2) *Confinement is a form of moulding, whereas control is modulation.* Deleuze says this can be seen most clearly in the breakdown of trade unions, and the corresponding breakdown of the wage-bargaining process that has been replaced by individual workplace contracts (i.e., the "gig economy" beloved of platform corporations like Uber and Deliveroo) that pit worker against worker in a situation of infra-class antagonism rather than infra-class solidarity. 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 today" (Deleuze, 1995: 179). 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" (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 competency or a vocation. Not even education, to continue with my previous example, is immune from this trend, Deleuze laments. Schooling has been replaced "by *continuing education* and exams by continuous assessment" (179). To which he adds, showing uncanny prescience: "It's the surest way of turning education into a business" (179).

(3) *Control mechanisms have replaced disciplinary apparatuses.* Disciplinary society is organised by the signature (of the individual) and the number (one's place in a social hierarchy), whereas control society is organised by codes (algorithms, metadata, GPS, and so on) and it takes no interest in either individuals or social

entities. Control society is far more advanced in its development today than it was when Deleuze first penned his essay. The more we come to understand the power of the major platforms like Google 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.[4]

If confinement has broken down, it is because new technology has facilitated vastly more intrusive and exploitative forms of what I will call "open capture". 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). As Shoshana Zuboff (2019) argues, Google's co-founder Larry Page understood that human experience could become (as indeed it has) Google's natural resource, which it could extract at almost no cost.

How have these changes been reflected in the built environment? In a necessarily preliminary way, and aggregating the work of several theorists, I will suggest that control society has yielded four key architectural forms: the mall, the theme park, the cloud, and the camp.

The Mall. The mall is arguably the first architectural form control society gave rise to in the immediate aftermath of World War 2, when the commodity-led boom began in America. It inaugurated a new kind of space that is, as Chun puts it, public but privately owned. People are encouraged to enter the space, but most do so according to the terms laid out by the mall's owners (2006: 38). The mall has been theorised as a panopticon by Mike Davis (1992: 242-243), among many others, because of the tight security measures many of them deploy, both to keep out so-called "undesirables" (i.e., poor people) and prevent theft.

But these measures were not part of the original design idea that sought to combine the galleria (Milan's famous Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II is the prototype), the department store (which is modelled on the museum), and the piazza, to create a self-contained space that functioned as a city within a city, in which people could mingle freely with commodities. In contrast to the panopticon, the primary purpose of the mall is to facilitate "looking".

As part of this, the mall fosters the kind of display (by both its vendors and customers) that encourages the look. Covert surveillance is in this sense anathema to its central organising premise. Mall-goers want to be seen! The mall is essentially a machine and its day-to-day operations are utterly dependent on machines too—it cannot function in the absence of the transport networks that connect it to its customer base, which is implicitly greater than the immediate vicinity can supply; it also depends on long logistics chains that invariably stretch around the globe; and it depends on air-conditioning, escalators, and bar codes for the comfort and convenience of its customers.[5]

The Theme Park. Related to the mall and born at almost the same time, the theme park is nevertheless distinct because it is predicated not on physical commodities, but rather on the intangible commodities of film and television. If the mall was built to enable people to mingle with commodities, then the theme park was built to enable people to enter the imaginary space of their favourite films and TV shows and mingle with the characters.

The extension of this idea into every aspect of daily life was accomplished when it was realised that the imaginary space did not need to originate with a movie, it

could build on fantasized notions of the past and the future and in a sense fantasized versions of films that have not yet been made, as was the case with Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*, which was a ride long before it was a movie, but was clearly built as though it replicated a movie.

Other examples include Starbuck's coffee shops, which have spread their fantasized simulacrum of an American corner café, that probably never existed, all over the world like a virus.[6] This style of architecture and design has been theorised as "hyperreality" by Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard. It can be understood as an absolute reversal of Benjamin's notion of aura because its key principle is precisely that the replica triumphs over the original, not merely as its replacement or substitute, but as the preferred object. The pinnacle example of this is perhaps the franchised "fake" Irish pub which was invented outside of Ireland but has lately been imported there, doubtless because the tourists expect to see such places and not the actual more modern pubs that evolved in the decades since the "fake" version was fixed as the image of what a pub should look like.

The Cloud. Platform capitalism is enabled by computer technology, which, far from being weightless and frictionless as techno-utopians like to proclaim, actually sits rather heavily on the earth. As Benjamin Bratton (2015) puts it, the cloud is a "terraforming project, covering the globe in subterranean wires and switches and overhead satellite relays, simultaneously centralizing and decentralizing computing and data storage and the social relations that depend upon them" (116).

It has very specific infrastructure demands too. Among other things it needs "cheap energy, cheap space, proximity to ocean passage, lax regulation on data storage, earthquake and flood avoidance, perimeter security, ideal temperature control" and so on (116).[7] In many ways, the server farm is the most typical architectural form of control society. Undoubtedly, it is also the least noticed. In part this is because it is usually hidden from view, built into old coal mines, ice caves, disused shopping malls, and office buildings, but also because it is often very drab and looks like an ordinary warehouse. But there can be no question that these structures are among the most important buildings on earth: global communications would collapse without them. If they look like ordinary warehouses, it may perhaps seem wrong to suggest they are a new form. In one sense this is obviously true, but only if we look at them from the outside.

When we consider what goes on inside these buildings, it is clear they are in fact a new form and one that is going to proliferate as our global use of the internet and data processing services increases (Carroll, 2020). Their most important characteristic, which perhaps makes them unique, is that they are not designed with humans, or indeed any living creature, in mind, yet they contain within them a vast record of human activity. They are windowless, airless, dark ("lights out" is their dream), soulless places where machines hum and whir and humans are on hand solely to attend to the needs of the computers. Control spaces are ultimately ahuman spaces.[8] I include under this category so-called fulfilment centres (Amazon's word for its distribution and warehouse centres—it is perhaps worth adding that Amazon is one of the largest providers of cloud services, which constitute nearly a third of its business), too, because they are similarly designed for robots, even if they still employ humans, and offer nothing but blank walls to the outside observer. If the mall was the first form of control architecture, then

the cloud may well be the last, because it is the single most powerful threat to the urban fabric yet produced. People who shop online, work online, entertain themselves online, and so on, do not need or want malls, theatres, stores, or even high streets.

The Camp. The commodities boom underpinning the aforementioned spaces has its dark but nonetheless "open secret", which is the fact that it is premised on camps. Contemporary society exhibits several varieties of camp—refugee camps, asylum camps, workers camps, sweatshops, and slums, to name a few. As Deleuze puts it, "[o]ne thing, it's true, hasn't changed—capitalism still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts and too numerous to be confined: control will have to deal not only with vanishing frontiers, but with mushrooming shantytowns and ghettos" (1995: 181).

Camps are not recent inventions—as Agamben (2000: 38-39) notes, historians debate whether the first concentration camps appeared in Cuba (1896) or South Africa (1899-1902)—but they have become ubiquitous in the period since the Second World War and as Mike Davis (1992) documented with care in his book *Planet of Slums*, they are proliferating. They are defined by their hostility toward life. In most cases, they only barely meet the minimum requirements for sustaining life. What sets them apart, though, from the slums and prison camps in times gone past is the fact these places exist amidst absolute abundance—we have more than enough wealth, food, and resources on a planetary scale for all people to live well (this does not mean to a so-called "American standard" necessarily, but it does mean to a standard capable of sustaining a good life). We might blame religion and racism and geopolitics, but ultimately it is simply a failure of hospitality toward the other. It is the ultimate form of the closed door.

Lastly, these four forms are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive—doubtless other forms could be adduced: for example, I am tempted to nominate transport hubs like airports, or freeway interchanges (à la Banham), as possible candidates, and I expect there are other plausible candidates too. By the same token, the line between malls and theme parks is blurred, as Michael Sorkin's great collection of essays *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992) demonstrated. But so is the line between the cloud and the camp inasmuch as each tends toward the inhuman in their own way. If disciplinary society yielded spaces designed to survey and form humans into subjects, then we can say by way of contrast that control society is yielding spaces that transform those subjects into customers, data points, and finally redundant bodies that can be piled on the scrapheap.

Acknowledgements

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ENDNOTES

1 Han (2017: 24) taxes Agamben (unjustly in my view) for failing to recognise that contemporary technology is no longer disciplinary in its mode of operation.

2 By business (*l'enterprise*), Deleuze means what we would today refer to in English as a corporation, which is a very different kind of entity from the organisations that existed in the disciplinary era, for which Marx was both poet laureate and vivisector.

3 I do not necessarily agree with all of Srnicek's arguments, but there is no doubting the insightfulness of his notion of platform capitalism.

4 Writing almost two decades ago, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2006: 6-9) argues that Deleuze gives too much credit to the powers of control society's capabilities. While there may be some truth in that, I would say that the issue isn't whether control society can do the things we imagine it is capable of, but whether it would do the things it might be capable of. In other words, I think the ethical question is more important than the technical question, which is in any case in a constant state of being overcome. On this score, it is clear that there are no implicit moral or ethical limits to the lengths data companies will go in pursuit of profit. This can be demonstrated in any number of ways, so I will just offer one particularly egregious example of a drug company, Mundipharma, using Google searches to identify possible opioid users suffering from constipation by tracking their search and then sending them targeted ads for their laxative laced product. See Branley (2019).

5 It is has been theorised in these terms by Koolhaas and Jameson, among others, as I discuss in Buchanan (2006).

6 I have written more extensively about the simulacrum and space in Buchanan (2005).

7 In 2015, it was estimated that the world's data centres combined used 3% of the world's electricity supply, which is greater than the total amount of electricity consumed by the UK (Bridle, 2018: 63).

8 For example, Amazon, which is both the largest retail company on earth and the largest provider of data services, organises its fulfilment centres according to a machine logic known as "chaotic storage" that is impenetrable to the humans, though not the robots, who work there (Bridle, 2018: 114-115).