Zones of Trauma:
On Deleuze and Control

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In his discussion of the transition from the cinema of the movement-image to the cinema of the time-image, Deleuze famously makes way for the traumatic intrusion of history. This transition, he writes, is not purely internal to cinema, but the result of the emergence of

> 'any spaces whatever', deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers. (1989: xi)

These spaces are the result of the destruction caused by the Second World War, creating new forms of anonymous or empty space: bombed cities, abandoned villages, the chaos of what Thomas Pynchon, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, called "the zone" (1975: 281-616).[1] It is these spaces, especially in Italian neo-realism, which will break up the movement-image and release "a little time in a pure state" (Deleuze 1989: xi). Due to the stark emptiness of these spaces and their anonymity, characters or images will no longer be embedded in movement but instead become detached into time.

This preamble is a way of saying that Deleuze's essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992) is a traumatic intrusion into the body (or body without organs) of 'Deleuzianism'. It is the traumatic intrusion of a new or mutated regime of capitalism and power. This is an intrusion from the outside, or from history, but also one mediated by thought. It is perhaps more traumatic for that. It is not only that "history is what hurts" (Jameson 2002: 88), but history mediated or intensified by thought is more traumatic. It stands no longer as a potentially contingent intrusion but as an element of thought. This traumatic intrusion of history (and logic and programme – to use the terms of the essay) is folded into thought. The fold is not simply the baroque fold that

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[1] We might also think here of another 'zone'. This is the 'zone' of Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979) and its source novel *Roadside Picnic* (1972), by Arkady and Boris Stugarsky. The zone, in this case, is the result of alien visitation, in the form of discarded technologies in a zone that might just be the result of the alien equivalent of a roadside picnic. This zone has become a ubiquitous trope, occurring in the work of M. John Harrison and Jeff VanderMeer.

Deleuze explored (1993), which would become the image for the neo-liberal adoption of Deleuzianism, especially in architecture (Spencer 2016). Instead, this is a fold that folds capitalism into conceptuality. The trauma is that the essay re-inscribes central concepts and tropes of Deleuzianism as crucial operators of the societies of control. What might have seemed to promise or prioritize resistance – as Deleuze said in his book on Foucault: "*resistance comes first*" (1988: 89) – now seems to invert into its opposite. As in Nietzsche's work, in which the highest sign of health could also be the sign of the worst illness, or vice versa, we enter into a strange zone of indistinguishability.

The concepts that we might have associated with the 'positive' Deleuzian project, its 'affirmationism' (Noys 2010), are suddenly reversed by Deleuze. Modulation, fluxes, flows, and waves, after all "[e]verywhere *surfing* has already replaced the older *sports*" (Deleuze 1992: 6). These are now all forms of control. Similarly, with the dividual, this is not the anti-humanist dispersion of the self or ego, but the transformation of the individual into "masses, samples, data, markets, or '*banks*'" (Deleuze 1992: 5). Everything you might expect Deleuze to laud or love, especially if you had read *Anti-Oedipus*, now appears as part of the transformation of contemporary capitalism. The trauma is, due to Deleuze's thinking, that this is not merely contingent, but integrated into the body of Deleuze's thought. It is not by chance that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts come into being in a way that now seems to match the societies of control, but by design. Deleuze does not shirk the difficulty of this proximity.

The essay itself is, of course, uncannily prescient. The regime of "universal modulation" Deleuze (1992: 7) predicts has come to pass: a world of passwords, perpetual training, continuous control, and of the power of debt. All that is lacking are the "new weapons" Deleuze sought (1992: 4), unless we see those, as some do, in the new forms of amorphous and 'suicidal' struggles that mark the present moment (Clover 2016). Particularly uncanny is Deleuze's suggestion that

> If the most idiotic television game shows are so successful, it's because they express the corporate situation with great precision. [...] [T]he corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within. (1992: 4-5)

The fusion of game show and corporation is now evident in *The Apprentice* and then the fusion of that with the state with Donald Trump. The contours of Deleuze's analysis now appear to be fully realised as the tendencies of our present. What we have to look forward to, it seems, is an intensification of control that has already been laid out by Deleuze.

The very success of the analysis is, however, what produces the traumatic effect. This is the disturbing thing. Deleuze and Guattari's (whose role should not be forgotten

or minimised)[2] intuition and conceptualisation places them very close to the mutations of contemporary capitalism. What is the tracing of a diagnosis can come to appear as the disease. The language of Deleuze and Guattari, their imagery, which tries always to produce the real, is in danger of being realised in the real as the society of control. Their own desire to collapse metaphor into the real (Deleuze/Guattari 1983: 1), their own hostility to the mediation of the signifier,[3] leads to an immanence of the theory that is coterminous with the capitalist real. What is the source of power is also the source of risk. Deleuze and Guattari appear as the thinkers of our moment, but also might come to coincide with that moment. The very predictive power to analyse control might, in some uncanny way, even risk conjuring that society of control.[4]

Of course, the Deleuzian will have easy answers to this. If *Anti-Oedipus* takes risks then the gains of resonance and prescience are worth the cost. A closer reading of the text, rather than extracting some of the more memorable slogans, would suggest the complexity of that text. Even if we admit there are problems, then so do Deleuze and Guattari. In particular, in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What Is Philosophy?*, the risks of a 'bad' reading of desire and of 'absolute deterritorialization' are explored and countered. It is not a matter of the 'accelerationist' desire (Noys 2014) to crash through the limits and immerse in the real. Instead, as Deleuze and Guattari say in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the production of a body without organs is to be done with "a very fine file", not a sledge-hammer (1988: 160). Again, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they insist that "[s]taying stratified is not the worst that can happen" (1988: 161) and urge us to "[n]ever believe a smooth space will suffice to save us" (1988: 500). These multiplying cautions suggest the need to carefully distinguish Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual terminology from its seeming similarity to forms of capitalism. Of course, there is a truth to this proximity, Deleuze and Guattari are concerned to develop an analysis of the tendencies of capitalism, and so they must stay close to it, but they also must not be mistaken for it. We could also turn to

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[2] Deleuze notes that "Felix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position – licit or illicit – and effects a universal modulation" (1992: 7).

[3] The preference is for Hjelmslev, who for Deleuze and Guattari is the linguist of language as immanence and hence has created "the only linguistics adapted to the nature of *both* the capitalist *and* the schizophrenic flows: until now, the only modern – and not archaic – theory of language" (1983: 243).

[4] This was a risk Burroughs was well aware of. Burroughs's cut-up and fold-in methods placed themselves close to magic and, for Burroughs, had predictive and conjurational power. This problem of the writer predicting or bringing about the future they are attempting to warn about is also pursued by the writer Iain Sinclair, influenced by Burroughs, who writes "by writing it he causes it to happen" (2004: 51). We could also trace this problem through Deleuze's invocation of the 'powers of the false' in cinema (1989: 126-55) and Deleuze's discussions of trance and myth in the same work. Finally, this situation was formalised by the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) as 'hyperstition', a 'practical fiction' designed to 'colonize the future, traffic with the virtual, and continually re-invent itself' (2015). While seemingly emancipatory, not least from the notion of 'truth', the risk of this politics of prediction and performative myth is the lack of rationality. Recent manipulations by state actors, quasi-state actors and various groupings of the extreme right, have shown the risks of the 'powers of the false' and various hyperstitions.

Deleuze's earlier articulations of the virtual and the actual (1991, 1997), which are both 'real', as ways of complicating the seeming collapse of metaphor into the real (or Lacanian Real) that we seem to find in *Anti-Oedipus*. That is to say that there are conceptual resources in Deleuze to resist the mapping or collapsing of his thought into identity with contemporary capitalism. The difficulty that remains concerns the strength of these resources as points of resistance and the dangers involved in this proximity to capitalism qua 'real'.

The other difficulty is that this multiplication of nuance does not always appear to be conceptually integrated into Deleuzianism. The trauma of the "Postscript" remains because this identity of Deleuzian operators with the operators of control was not fully worked-through. Instead, the calls to caution can seem like arbitrary and even moralistic impositions on the flows of deterritorialization, a point made by Nick Land (2012: 277-81). I am not endorsing Land's aim to push things further beyond what he regards as the dangerous risk that "the tawdry pact between the preconscious and the superego that has dominated socialism since its inception would be reinstated at the heart of a – now wholly spurious – schizophrenic neonomadism" (2012: 281). Land's hostility to the left would develop, first, into the embrace of deterritorialization as realised by authoritarian capitalism, in the form of China, and, second, into the vicious 'return' of reterritorializing forms of racial classification and racism to organise this capitalist delirium. Instead, the trauma remains. Land's solution, the contours of right and reactionary accelerationism, is to sheer off any holding back and accept the identification of deterritorialization with 'universal modulation'. In this way trauma is denied or displaced into the shattering of the subject itself, which is always observed from a distance as it is melded within the capitalist sensorium. 'New weapons' are abandoned, or become forms of absolute identification.

Certainly, Land's is an unusual and dissident Deleuzianism, not representative of the major trends of response to Deleuze's thought. Land's own literalisation of Deleuze remains, however, disturbing. If Land identifies Deleuze with capitalism, we also have those who try to return Deleuze to a negativity that might break this relation: the "dark" (Culp 2016) or "negative" Deleuze (Toscano 2008). They seek again those moments within the body of Deleuzianism that shake it lose from what Foucault called a "happy" positivism (2002: 141). My preference is for the second, which is salutary and often convincing. I do not think, however, that such readings can deny the final point and principle of affirmation for Deleuze, which is the power of life. Resistance comes first, as we noted, because the insurgent power of life comes first or, which amounts to the same result, is what remains. The fundamental affirmation of the power of life is what is supposed to resist control, while, again, the biopolitics of control works exactly on the concept of life. We are called to put our faith in an 'excess' of life over any mode of determination. No matter how 'dark' or 'negative' Deleuze is, this faith seems to remain. Even if

Deleuze's is an expanded concept of life, one that integrates the technological and ma-chinic, it is still affirmed as the point or place of escape.

That contemporary life continues to instantiate a biopolitics, in whatever form, is widely attested. Again, Deleuze and Foucault were prescient analysts of the emergent order, if both in seemingly peripheral texts – Deleuze's essay on control societies and Foucault's lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which might better be titled *The Birth of Neoliberal Biopolitics* (2004). The insistence on the insurgent value of life risks the same re-stating of the problem we have already traced: life is 'perpetually' resistance, but also 'perpetually' captured or controlled. Modulation is, precisely, that 'incitement' or 'in-crease' of life that constantly engages it within control. Of course, such claims can seem to be the very model of despair. In contrast, the 'joy' of life we find in Deleuze, although life in his texts is often associated with the most extreme 'near death' experiences of co-ma and exhaustion (2001), is what immunizes us against modulation. If we assert that life is 'captured' by modulation we appear to give up any hope of resistance. To be a crit-ic of Deleuze is to face the trap of being regarded as a pessimist who cannot see 'new weapons' but only the forces of control.

This is a risk to be run, because I would suggest the seeming 'joy' or 'happiness' of Deleuze, or variants of Deleuze, comes at the cost of dogmatic insistence that 'life will find a way' – precisely the point at which a metaphysics of resistance encounters a pro-to-capitalist metaphysics of complexity that denies rational organization or structure. *Jurassic Park* standing as much for the insurgence of market forces as the insurgence of 'life' – perhaps evident in the comedy of the repeated sequels in which the scale of the problem does not prevent another entrepreneurial attempt at 'capture'. Life, and box office, finds a way. So, while apparently always instantiating the resistant powers of life, this thinking, to my mind, remains within a circle in which that 'productive' power of life serves a cycle of capitalist production – something Deleuze and Guattari were well aware of, and hence Deleuze's admirable sobriety in his thought.

I want to conclude by offering some remarks that do not amount to a solution or a 'saving' of Deleuze – not even in that mode of the American military in which saving is equivalent to destroying. The difficulty, I think, lies in the potential schematic nature of the abstraction 'control' in opposition to the abstraction 'life'. This is not to simply con-demn abstraction, nor offer a more complex critique of abstraction, of the kind found in Bergson (Deleuze 1991). Instead, I think that while control offers insight and depth of analysis that gives Deleuze's text its prescience, it also risks condensing a whole series of phenomena into one concept. Life, on the other side, is also too abstract a concept, even if it is, for Deleuze, a concept that is most concrete. Instead, I would suggest we integrate the analysis of capitalism found in *Anti-Oedipus*, especially those elements that probe the density and opacity of capitalist forms. Contrary to the 'accelerationist' elements and

tendencies that can be used to characterize that text, we should also note the analysis of money and debt that will be mentioned in the societies of control essay and taken up most recently by Maurizio Lazzarato (2012). This might also engage the 'problems' of the virtual and the actual, in terms of the actualization of 'tendencies' of capitalist production and a 'rectification' of problems (Deleuze 1997: 208).

The advantage of returning to *Anti-Oedipus*, problematic as I find it, is integrating again and in more detail the analysis of capital into our theoretical and critical work. This, I think, would nuance and deepen the analysis of 'control' into something more substantial, especially as a phenomenology of contemporary capitalism. This is to engage with the dual problems of reification and personification as 'legal categories and social correlatives' (Rose 2017: 58). On the other side, the side of life, this concept would need to be analyzed with, and beyond, some of its problematic vitalist elements. This is not a matter of abandoning life. That would be to leave life as subject of capitalism. It is not, however, enough to assume life will always escape or 'find a way'. In a sense, the 'exhausted' examples of life that Deleuze (2001) deploys speak more to Agamben's notion of 'bare life' (1998) than they do to celebrations of its power. Once again, we might place this notion of exhaustion in the biopolitics of our moment – 'sleepless' (Crary 2014) and 'fatiguing' (Rabinbach 1990). Therefore, as usual, we have not finished reading Deleuze. The essay "Postscript on the Societies of Control" places us into a zone of trauma, for us and for Deleuzianism. That zone, however, is where we live. Hence, to return to that essay is to return to unravelling and working with the central concepts of Deleuze, notably 'control' and 'life', even if we work against them. In this way, in this zone of trauma, we might start to find 'new weapons', or the ways towards them.

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