EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION
DELEUZE / FOUCAULT: A NEOLIBERAL DIAGRAM

NEOLIBERAL DIAGRAMMATICS AND DIGITAL CONTROL

MATTHEW TIENSEN & GREG ELMER (eds.)

The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 142)

The diagram is ... a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field.... And from one diagram to the next, new maps are drawn. (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 30, 37)

Diagrammatic concepts and ways of understanding are central to the arguments on the interdependent and ever shifting relations of power, control, and capitalism presented by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. These relations feature as a central motif in Deleuze’s book, Foucault, wherein the figure of the diagram extends the spatialized Panopticism proffered by Foucault (Elmer, 2004, p. 41). “Diagrammatics” refers to the pre-conditions of conditions. It references the “map of relations between forces” that constitute particular states of affairs: affective assemblages, environments or ecologies, and actualizations of the not yet (Deleuze, 1986, p. 36). The diagram, for Deleuze (and for Deleuze’s Foucault), “passes through every point” (1986, p. 36) and acts as a “non-unifying immanent cause ... coextensive with the whole social field.” The diagram is that which is the cause of the “concrete assemblages that execute its relations” (1986, p. 37). These relations, Deleuze states, exist and operate
within “the very tissue of the assemblages they produce” (1986, p. 37). To articulate an adequate accounting of diagrammatics is to begin to map the “complete conditions”—at once human and nonhuman, actual and virtual, material and immaterial—that pre-empt and pre-define what we later come to identify as “the real” (1994, p. 159).

The objective of this special issue of MediaTropes—guest edited by Matthew Tiessen and Greg Elmer of the Infoscape Research Lab at Ryerson University—is to probe the edges and depths of what we call the “neoliberal diagram.” We define the neoliberal diagram as that panoply of factors that today constitute the relations of forces that pre-condition the range of potentials available to life in all its forms. This diagram is constituted by actors that include global governance institutions; national governments; international financial conglomerates (to whom, it is becoming clearer, governments are frequently obligated); globally surveilled Internet infrastructures; and corporations of worldwide reach, scope, and power. Through policy, projected military power, financial sleight-of-hand, and generalized public consent, power is consolidated in ways that are increasingly unavoidable and irrepresible. After the 2008 global credit crunch, this system or field of potential we are calling the neoliberal diagram has never actually been in crisis. Rather, the neoliberal diagram’s apparent “crises” have been seized upon as a sort of smooth space (in a Deleuzean sense), for experimenting with what governments, corporations, and globalist institutions of governance describe as “exceptional” situations that require “solutions.” Consider the name given by the Canadian government to its version of a post-credit crisis bank bailout program: the “Extraordinary Financing Framework.” Beginning in 2008, a year when the entirety of the Canadian government’s federal budget expenditures amounted to C$237.4 billion, the bailout-by-another-name provided C$200 billion of liquidity to the nation’s banking system (Stanford, 2011). Indeed, the vocabulary and euphemism-filled mediascape that has sprung up to bolster our post-credit crunch milieu is astonishing. Not only is it a demonstration of effective top-down public relations management but of how meaning-making and logic-generating apparatuses are capable of redefining whole swathes of “reality.” What think tanks, we ask, burn the midnight oil to churn out benign sounding (but devastating) turns of phrase such as: austerity measures, quantitative easing, tapering, debt ceilings, resilience and/or design thinking, bail-ins, “extraordinary,” enemy combatant, stability levies, and so on?

As the expanding neoliberal diagram of metadata-driven digital “dividuation” is ushered into place, it whispers “don’t be evil” (Google) and encourages us to “connect with friends” (Facebook) and be transparent to the
world. We obey by fulfilling our desires to connect, promote, project, proclaim. But behind the Twitter-saturated veneer the invisible workings of the neoliberal diagram seek to monetize what once had no price: friendship, curiosity, culture, communication. The neoliberal diagram is always in need of expansion and extension, always declaring this or that new commodity/analytic (friendship, self identity, air, water, space, time) capable of serving as collateral for its future investments, takeovers, collapses, invasions, bubbles. Moreover, this perpetual effort by the neoliberal diagram to collateralize an increasingly nebulous sphere of “commodities” also serves to distribute the risk inherent in the diagram’s fragility to an ever-widening swathe of witting and unwitting participants.

Today, it is hard to keep track of the “exceptional” expressions of the neoliberal diagram. The President of the United States uses drones that kill American citizens (Savage & Baker, 2013); American whistle blower Bradley/Chelsea Manning reveals the illegal military acts of her own government (Hoyng, 2013). The Guardian reporter, Glenn Greenwald, reveals the documents leaked by Edward Snowden that describe the Orwellian digital surveillance and data-harvesting programs of the National Security Agency (NSA). NSA spooks hacked the servers of Google and Facebook (Gellman, et al., 2013). UK border police use illegal detention, intimidation, and anti-terrorism legislation in an attempt to prevent Greenwald’s partner, David Miranda, from delivering the information he carried (Bowcott, 2013). The brazen government-sponsored destruction of the Guardian newspaper’s computers that housed the data related to Edward Snowden’s NSA-damning documents (Borger, 2013). News that the Canadian government aided the NSA’s attempts to spy on world leaders at Toronto’s G20 summit and continues to data-mine the social media output of Canadian citizens (Weston, 2013). These are examples of diagrammatics or Prism-atics (The NSA Files: The Guardian, 2013).

Still other examples include taking the world to the edge of regional conflict in Syria, while the very next week no media coverage of Syria is to be found (Lizza, 2013). The rumblings from global governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) about the benefits of global “bail-ins” and “one-off capital levies” that debt-ridden governments could impose on citizens “before avoidance is possible” (IMF, 2013, p. 49). Stratospheric banker bonuses go hand-in-hand with record-breaking American stock markets (Mackenzie, 2013). Annual debacles over “raising the debt ceiling” threaten the United States’ and the global economy (Avlon, 2013). The banking oligarchy pays billions in “fines” for fraudulently “misrepresenting” assets and interest rates while benefiting from 0% interest rate loans from the Federal Reserve
(New York Times Editorial Board, 2013; Eichelberger, 2013). These and many other examples show that the neoliberal diagram’s supposed exception-to-freedom has in fact become a carefully and consistently redrawn rule.

What is more, in our war-, surveillance-, and debt-saturated societies, the neoliberal diagram is an expression of power’s capacity to wring every drop from the customers, clients, and citizens who bestow it with legitimacy. Deleuze was a theorist of power in the spirit of Nietzsche. He declares that power “is diagrammatic” insofar as it has no particular shape but determines shape itself (1986, p. 73). Diagrammatic power is flexible in order to adapt and absorb the states of affairs it creates. As Deleuze explains, a diagram of power:

mobilizes non-stratified matter and functions, and unfolds with a very flexible segmentarity. In fact, it passes not so much through forms as through particular points which on each occasion mark the application of a force, the action or reaction of a force in relation to others, that is to say an affect like “a state of power that is always local and unstable.” (1986, p. 73)

Recent IMF policy initiatives, rhetoric, and working papers shed light on facets of the neoliberal diagram we are describing here. These documents make explicit IMF designs to tighten the global financial industry’s grip on power by extending its reach through data-mining and dot-connecting. The aim is to increase financial industry access to quasi-legitimate sources of funding, contingent capital, and collateral. In a working paper titled “Why are the G-20 Data Gaps Initiative and the SDDS Plus Relevant for Financial Stability Analysis?” author Robert Heath (2013) describes how the IMF’s Financial Stability Board is determined to plug all monetary “Data Gaps.” This attempt to close off the diagram’s “relatively free points, points of creativity, change, and resistance” is undertaken in order to contribute to “stability” (or perpetuity) in the current post-crisis financial system by providing access to all financial transactions from the micro to the macro level (Heath, 2013, p. 3). According to the IMF, “a lack of data inhibited early warning and the timely response by policy makers once the [2008] crisis emerged.” For this reason, Data Gaps must be filled because “nothing frightens financial markets more than uncertainty arising from a lack of information” (2013, p. 4). The nimble and evolving logic of the neoliberal diagram is also on display in a just-released IMF document titled “Taxing Times.” To maintain the current world financial order when there are national debt emergencies, the paper suggests that countries may need to seize the financial assets of citizens. Under the heading, “A One-Off Capital Levy?” the IMF document explains that the “sharp deterioration of the public finances in many countries” has led to a “revived interest” in a “capital levy”
(that is, a one-off tax on private wealth) “as an exceptional measure to restore debt sustainability” (IMF, 2013, p. 49). What is the appeal of this exceptional “tax”? We are told that “if it is implemented before avoidance is possible” the “one-time tax” (i.e., this theft in service of the diagram) will “not distort behaviour.” Indeed, the exceptional tax “may be seen by some as fair” (2013, p. 49). Of course, speed is of the essence if such a path were to be pursued. Any “delay in introduction” would create room for “extensive avoidance and capital flight” (2013, p. 49). To what extent would citizens be levied? The IMF suggests “10 percent on households with positive net wealth” (2013, p. 49).

These IMF initiatives provide a glimpse into the flexibility and reach of the neoliberal diagram relative to that of the citizens (i.e., taxpayers) in whose so-called interest these initiatives are implemented. When coupled with the NSA revelations brought to light by Snowden, the diagram’s need for data (not to mention dollars and debtors) in order to maintain “business as usual” is readily apparent. From the perspective of the inflating neoliberal diagram and as defined by the monetary pragmatics of contemporary global power and (digitized) control, the question can be understood as follows: Where is the money (the diagram’s lifeblood) and how can we compel the public to desire that technocratic controllers commandeer it?

As Deleuze explains in Foucault, one of the most significant features of the diagram as a field of determining forces is that it modulates actualities and the social field it produces. Through its adaptability and its instability it is always determining from a distance. It does this to remain behind the scenes, to give its progeny the impression that their realities are theirs alone, and that their apparent agencies belong to them.

These power-relations, which are simultaneously local, unstable and diffuse, do not emanate from a central point or unique locus of sovereignty, but at each moment move “from one point to another” in a field of forces, marking inflections, resistances, twists and turns, when one changes direction, or retraces one’s steps. This is why they are not “localized” at any given moment. They constitute a strategy, an exercise of the non-stratified, and these “anonymous strategies” are almost mute and blind, since they evade all stable forms of the visible and the articulable. (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 73–74)

Today, the diagram has added to its adaptability and instability the power of perceived and real fragility. This diagrammatic fragility courses through the entire neoliberal system, functioning as an omnipresent threat that further inflicts and infects what we have come to sense as our (inevitable) reality.
Consider the perpetually under-funded military industrial complex. Consider as well the budget woes of local and national governments. And let us not overlook the kid-glove treatment required of the “economy” that always requires tending and nourishment. Indeed, the neoliberal diagram’s need for perpetual monetary sustenance traps both creditors and debtors in a system that risks implosion at any moment. As Philip Goodchild explained at a conference on “Rethinking Capitalism” at the University of California at Santa Cruz, the contemporary economy/neoliberal diagram is a “system of interlocking liabilities” built on financial and governmental institutions that are at once players within the system as well as the “conditions for the survival of the system.” This monetary prison (or is it “Prism,” the name of the NSA’s surveillance programs?) is one of interconnected fragility. It derives its coercive powers by way of its very “weakness” (Goodchild, 2010).

Deleuze and Guattari anticipate these characteristics when they suggest that the diagrammatic “does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.” Moreover, in constructing new types of realities the diagram “does not stand outside history but is instead always ‘prior to’ history,” creating the history-to-come according to its own specifications and systemic requirements (1987, p. 141). In the case of the neoliberal diagram, systemic requirements are often the handmaidens of finance. War, territory, resource extraction, taxation, debts, loans, the biosphere, and even our genes are today viable fodder for monetization and therefore instrumentalization. Deleuze and Guattari recognize the need to monetize everything as one of the ways contemporary modes of (capitalist) power are expressed. They explain:

In a certain sense capitalist economists are not mistaken when they present the economy as being perpetually “in need of monetarization,” as if it were always necessary to inject money into the economy from the outside according to a supply and a demand. In this manner the system indeed holds together and functions, and perpetually fulfills its own immanence. In this manner it is indeed the global object of an investment of desire. The wage earner’s desire, the capitalist’s desire, everything moves to the rhythm of one and the same desire, founded on the differential relation of flows having no assignable exterior limit, and where capitalism reproduces its immanent limits on an ever widening and more comprehensive scale. (1983, p. 239)

The current neoliberal diagram’s manufacturing of an apparent prosperity hologram, with American stockmarkets at an all-time high and interest rates...
remaining at an all-time low, raises questions. We wonder: [1] What is the endgame? [2] Where are we going? [3] How can we resist? [4] How might we escape (or even mobilize a desire to escape)? Indeed, eighty-five years after propagandist Edward Bernays advised those in power on how the opinions of the masses could be “moved, directed, and formed,” we wonder with Deleuze how the illusions or “diagramoptics” on view today could possibly be identified by those with the most to lose in the event that this globe-spanning diagram begins to self-destruct (1928, p. 971). Or conversely, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “how does one come to desire strength while also desiring one’s own impotence? How was such a social field able to be invested by desire? And how far does desire go beyond so-called objective interests, when it is a question of flows to set in motion and to break?” (1983, p. 239).

It is not enough to theorize. The nodes of the neoliberal diagram are there for all to see. Indeed, neoliberal institutions—governments, central banks, global corporations—are recasting themselves as “transparent,” open, and friendly (Tiessen, 2013). Conjuring up concepts and entertaining abstractions merely contributes to the field of entertainment and distraction so powerfully mobilized by the diagrammatics that is their apparent target. Deleuze agrees with this assessment, declaring: “On all counts, abstract ideas are thoroughly inadequate: they are images that are not explained by our power of thinking, but that involve, rather, our impotence; images that do not express the nature of things, but indicate, rather, the variability of our human constitution” (1990, pp. 277–278). Or, as he wrote elsewhere: “There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons” (1992, p. 4). One of the “new” weapons Deleuze promoted was “hijacking.” According to Deleuze, when facing a field of communication that has been “corrupted” and “permeated” by “money,” we must “hijack speech” (or what passes for “speech”) and, we might surmise, commandeer meaning (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175). We do this not by capitulating to the diagram’s need for counter-perspectives or “fair and balanced” confrontations and debates, but by exiting the conversation altogether. Unplug … go underground … move your money … refuse to vote for oligarchy-supporting political parties … support community initiatives and local businesses … develop more sustainable and independent social, cultural, economic, and ecological systems … construct alternative zones for living that are as incompatible with the neoliberal diagram. As Deleuze understood, to create is not necessarily to combat. Nor is it to communicate (especially in a world where communication has been corrupted). “Creating has always been something different from communicating.” Instead, the objective in his view is to engage actively in “noncommunication,” to create “vacuoles” and “circuit breakers” so that we can “elude control” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175).
What we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume…. Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175)

What are the circuit breakers Deleuze describes? They remain to be invented. But in a world where the NSA is determined to target and surveil “any device, anywhere, all the time,” we can assume that future resistance will likely be anything but digital (Risen & Poitras, 2013). For now, when these vacuoles have not yet taken shape, this special issue of MediaTropes aims to offer different points of entry to neoliberal diagrammatics and new perspectives on their determining effects.

In this issue of MediaTropes

Greg Elmer opens this special issue of MediaTropes on Deleuze, Foucault, and the neoliberal diagram by examining the multiple meanings of “going public.” Going public conventionally refers to the moment when the stocks of private companies begin trading on publicly accessible exchanges. Recently, Facebook and Twitter (two of social media’s highest flyers), went public on the NASDAQ exchange. Elmer argues that the meanings of going public in our social media-saturated world go far beyond initial public offerings (IPOs). He maintains that going public is the founding ethos upon which the contemporary Internet and the businesses and governments that profit from it rest. We are all, then, summoned to go public, to become transparent to the metadata-mining algorithms and processes of techno-quantification upon which neoliberal diagrammatics increasingly depend. Elmer argues that today’s post-Edward Snowden debates about online privacy might be regarded as ridiculous distractions and even smokescreens. The business model of the Internet requires commodification of our data. The patterns, choices, desires, relations, and knowledge produced by each of us must be made available online if the Web is to become a space of endless profit. As Elmer observes: “there would be no Google search engine or Facebook social networking platform without the content, information, and demographic profiles uploaded, revised, updated, and shared by billions of users worldwide.” He states:

[If] social media platforms are governed by ubiquitous surveillance and continuous uploading and sharing of personal

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information, opinions, habits, and routines, then privacy would seem only to be a hindrance to these processes. To ignore such clear mission statements, coupled with repetitive attempts to undermine, display, and obfuscate so-called privacy settings, would seem disingenuous at best, and wilfully blind at worst. Can we really conclude that such businesses violate users’ privacy when their platforms are in the first and last instance wired for ubiquitous publicity?

Elmer’s suggestion that today’s best efforts to promote online privacy are “disingenuous” and even delusional recalls the work of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) in the late 1990s. Members of the CAE explained that the Internet would become a breeding ground for capitalism and digitally modulated forms of imperceptibly powerful control. For the CAE, the “virtual bodies” we create when we “go public” online generate for each of us a “data body—a much more highly developed virtual form, and one that exists in complete service to the corporate and police state.” They observe that with its “immense storage capacity and its mechanisms for quickly ordering and retrieving information,” what they call the “technological apparatus,” will regard “no detail of social life” as “too insignificant to record and to scrutinize” (Critical Art Ensemble, 1997, p. 145).

From the moment we are born and our birth certificate goes online, until the day we die and our death certificate goes online, the trajectory of our individual lives is recorded in scrupulous detail. Education files, insurance files, tax files, communication files, consumption files, medical files, travel files, criminal files, investment files, files into infinity…. (1997, p. 145)

For Elmer, then, going public is the name of the neoliberal diagram’s game. Indeed, the fact that we willingly go public before being prompted to do so enables corporations that feed on our data to profit from it. Elmer wonders whether “privacy-based perspectives provide an adequate framework for understanding users’ relationships with social media platforms and their parent companies?” In so doing, he underscores the need to re-evaluate current thinking and envision new models for the ideal relationship between netizens and the Internet.

Petra Hroch extends the semantic critique begun by Elmer by interrogating the euphemistic ways concepts such as “resilience,” “sustainability,” and “social innovation” are mobilized in the service of today’s neoliberal imperatives. Hroch observes that popular terms such as “sustainability” and “social innovation” are in fact “schizoid modes of
representing what Deleuze calls ‘the cliché’ (the authority of the same) as ‘the new’ (difference).” For Hroch, the way these terms are used in popular discourse and within the larger context of the neoliberal diagram short-circuits “any real possibility of social transformation.” She notes that these concepts are only sustainable or innovative insofar as they capture and co-opt “creative energies in service to the status quo.”

To illustrate her position, Hroch examines *California Dreaming*, a film by Bregtje van der Haak (2010). The movie deals with Californians in a post-credit crunch era who blame themselves for their troubles. In the face of crushing poverty and few job prospects, they fault themselves for failing to be sufficiently innovative. They do not see governments, corporations, or financial systems as responsible for the crunch. Instead, these tragic figures internalize the neoliberal logic and see their economic hardships as brought on by themselves. For Hroch, these stories of down-and-out Californians reveal the ways “different neoliberal diagrams structure and modulate subjectivity and its relation to the social.” The film shows us how the Californians are complicit with the forces that control them. Hroch asks, “how can analysis of these shifty subjective-social structures point us to points of resistance? And why is it crucial that resistance to neoliberal diagrams—new cartographies—be understood in intensive, matter-mediated-modulated, non-oppositional, and non-binary modes?”

Matthew Tiessen’s article zeroes in more specifically on the financial dimensions of the neoliberal diagram. The focus is on how the financial world is dependent on debt and credit. Tiessen shows that the design of today’s international monetary form tilts the relationship between debtor and creditor in favour of the creditor. He argues that today’s credit-money can be regarded as a “sophisticated technology of dispossession” that “affects the social landscape by pre-conditioning it.” Tiessen describes how the financial system has built credit crises into its functioning. When the inevitable reckoning comes, the debtor’s assets are made available to the creditors on the cheap. Drawing on the philosophy of Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari, he helps articulate the social and affective dimension of debt and credit-money. Tiessen emphasizes that financial relations are social relations, and that money is a technology that works on behalf of those in a position to create and control it.

Erika Biddle examines the diagrammatics determining our changing relationship to our technosocial devices. She examines the ways that subjectivities and emerging forms of social control are increasingly modulated by communicative media and ever more sensual expressions of human-computer interaction (HCI). Her study takes us on a telejourney that begins
amidst the online worlds of Facebook and Twitter and ends in the hyper-
titillating virtual environments of extreme online pornography. Biddle reveals
the ways that immersive online forms of performativity and participation are
effective and efficient forms of “haptic,” “somatic,” affective, and sensorial
control. Her description recalls Paul Virilio’s warnings about the risks involved
when teletechnologies merge not only with our sexual appetites, but also with
our fleshy biological orifices and appendages.

   What was till now still “vital,” copulation suddenly becomes
optional, turning into the practice of remote-control
masturbation. At a time when innovations are occurring in
artificial fertilization and genetic engineering, they have actually
managed also to interrupt coitus, to short-circuit conjugal
relations between opposite sexes, with the aid of biocybernetic
(teledildonic) accoutrements using sensor-effectors distributed
over the genital organs…. This is where the very latest
perspective comes in: the tactile perspective of so-called
“touching at a distance” (tactile telepresence), which now puts
the finishing touches on the classic perspective of sight and
hearing. And we cannot begin to understand the outrageousness
of cybersexuality without this paradoxical cutaneous

According to Biddle, the Internet is becoming the ideal vehicle for how the
neoliberal diagram controls at a distance. With “the hyperconnectivity these
communications technologies enable, capitalism’s modes of desire and anxiety
are inscribed in bodies as processes wherein devices and their users have
become increasingly adaptive to each other. We are learning to experience the
body as a medium, rewiring our brains for new affects and learning from how
machines learn.” Biddle emphasizes the affective nature of the neoliberal
diagram’s efficacy, highlighting the ease with which our own desires and
pleasure-centres can be used to control us. She reminds us that the forces that
have the best chance of controlling us now and in the future will be those that
appear the most friendly, sexy, benign, colourful, titillating, cuddly, or cute.
The campaigns of Google and Facebook that are premised on not being “evil”
and on networking with “friends” are in fact the most extensive surveillance
campaigns ever known. For Biddle, these campaigns exemplify how power can
be designed in ways that make us clamour for our own subjugation.

   Andrew Iliadis’s contribution examines the many ways Deleuze’s
thought is indebted to the theories of his contemporary, Gilbert Simondon
(1924–1989). Iliadis’s study begins by showing how Simondon’s thinking built
on Aristotle’s theories of substance (hylomorphism). He then narrows the lens of the inquiry to focus on Deleuze’s explicit references to Simondon’s ontological arguments, especially his theories of individuation. These theories are significant today because philosophers and communication theorists such as Tiziana Terranova, Eugene Thacker, Bernard Stiegler, Isabelle Stengers, and Bruno Latour use them in their re-evaluations of how we think about materiality, identity, and technology. While Simondon’s theories have only recently gained attention in the English speaking academic world, Iliadis observes that they have long been in circulation through the work of Deleuze. While Deleuze rarely mentions Simondon by name in his published writings, he makes extensive use of the terms and concepts the latter developed, such as affect, complex system, disparation, virtual, actual, sensation, assemblage, and singularity. Iliadis sees Simondon’s theories of information as his most profound contribution to contemporary theories of technoculture. Simondon saw that information was more than communication transmitted from sender to receiver. Information is that which “structures reality” itself while not being itself a structure. Iliadis states that, “information is that which, depending on the way that it comes into contact with another abstraction of itself, unlocks or ‘clicks’ into another form of reality.” For Iliadis, then, Simondon offers not only a “new philosophy of causality” but also a “philosophy of information” that is apt for our time.

Gary Genosko’s contribution to this issue teases out an understudied discussion of semio-techniques from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. He shows how representation is at the centre of a public communication strategy Foucault describes as a “gentle way of punishing” that involves a “highly diverse array of punishments.” Genosko asks: “what was lost when the prison became ‘one of the most general forms’” of punishment (Foucault, 1995, p. 120)? In response, he articulates the function of this “semiogram of power” by bringing a “Foucauldian meditation to bear upon the analysis of the neoliberal surveillance state.” This analysis has the potential to provide the conceptual tools for “critically apprehending our current situation within a burgeoning neoliberal condition” that seeks to discipline populations in ever more imperceptible, delicate, and entertaining ways. Genosko focuses on what Foucault called “obstacle-signs” that are framed as “technologies of representation” designed to communicate all the disadvantages of criminal and illegal behaviour. His study makes a valuable contribution by demonstrating how today’s technologies of communication can be used to discipline neoliberalism’s publics.

Stephen James May brings this special issue of *MediaTropes* to a close. His study offers a “from-the-trenches” reminder of how the neoliberal
diagrammatics of our contemporary world occasionally removes its “don’t be evil” front to reveal its material modes of control. May’s contribution is informed by his personal experience amidst the turmoil of the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto. The 2010 Summit provides ample evidence of how the Toronto Police Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police surveilled Twitter and other social media platforms in support of their brutal crackdown on protesters and activists. May provides an on-the-ground perspective concerning an event that was recently re-animated by Edward Snowden’s leaks. Perhaps not surprisingly, Snowdon’s evidence showed that world leaders were being spied upon in Toronto right alongside the protestors (Weston, 2013). World leaders, after all, are as beholden as anyone to the diagrammatics of contemporary neoliberalism. May’s piece highlights how new modes of communication such as Twitter are Janus-faced. They are liberatory and revolutionary even as they are determining and the source of formidable new forms of disciplinary control.

The essays in this volume remind us that today’s neoliberal diagram operates in ways that are both visible and invisible, material and immaterial, implicit and explicit. A theme emerging from the studies in this special issue of *MediaTropes* is that our desires, relationships, and revolutionary impulses are being harvested, data-mined, dissected, and co-opted by power. Not only can they be used against us today, but they can be stored and used against us in the future. Indeed, insofar as the neoliberal diagram is a digital one, our own best efforts to escape only serve to reveal to those in a position to stop us where the exits—the lines of flight—are located.
Works Cited


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IPO 2.0: THE PANOPTICON GOES PUBLIC

GREG ELMER

A couple years before Facebook went public on the NASDAQ trading system with a controversial initial public offering or IPO, CEO Mark Zuckerberg sat down on stage with TechCrunch founder Michael Arrington for a brief discussion of the company’s future and its constantly changing set of privacy policies and protocols. Responding to concerns about recent changes to Facebook’s privacy policies, Zuckerberg claimed that the Internet, through the introduction of new social media platforms like blogs, had ushered in a new age of publicity. A published report of the event noted that “Zuckerberg told a live audience yesterday that if he were to create Facebook again today, user information would by default be public….”

Zuckerberg’s lament for a default-publicity, however, was soon turned into action with the 2009 decision to make status updates and other shared content publicly visible via search engines. Critics claimed it was Zuckerberg’s attempt to push “people to go public,” again a strategy that mirrored the terms of Facebook’s own push to “go public” on the NASDAQ Stock Market.

Soon after Facebook announced its intention to go public on the NASDAQ the social networking site embarked on a campaign of default publicity, a push for users—and all their information and activity on the platform—to go public. Critics of the updated policies, entitled “data use policy” (notably not “privacy policy”), complained that the company was hiding its intentions by spreading the data control preferences and options throughout the platform. Such actions of course help put into context the most recent announcement by Facebook that they intend to “use its customers’ profile photos to help their friends tag them in photos. Those photos are already public, but Facebook does not currently use them to help recognize faces when

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1 “Facebook’s Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over,”

2 “The Day Has Come,”
photos are uploaded to the service.”

A Facebook spokesperson claimed that “This will make the product better for people … You can still opt out of it.”

On June 13, 2013 Facebook competitor Google—a company that has also faced much criticism over their treatment of seemingly private information and communications—filed a motion in court to address a series of complaints over the privacy of its users’ communications. Mirroring Zuckerberg’s initiative to push users to go public, Google’s legal team claimed that “a person has no legitimate expectation of privacy in information he voluntarily turns over to third parties.”

To suggest that privacy is dead is, however, not to revel in or encourage its demise, nor even to claim that it is not a desirable outcome, right, or valued policy. Rather, what this paper suggests is that in certain circumstances (increasingly on social media platforms) the privacy of users now stands in direct opposition to the stated goals and logic of the technology in question. One need not give up certain goals of privacy to recognize that business models of online companies like Facebook and Google are now entirely predicated upon the act of going public—there would be no Google search engine or Facebook social networking platform without the content, information, and demographic profiles uploaded, revised, updated, and shared by billions of users worldwide.

This paper then offers some initial thoughts on a theory of publicity, of going public in the social media age. If social media platforms are governed by ubiquitous surveillance and continuous uploading and sharing of personal information, opinions, habits, and routines, then privacy would seem only to be a hindrance to these processes. To ignore such clear mission statements,

3 Critics have suggested that Apple has indeed gone one step further than Facebook by creating a so-called “Dark pattern” on their iPhone advertising tracking settings. Brignull (2013) notes that “A dark pattern is a user interface carefully crafted to trick users into doing things they might not otherwise do, such as buying insurance with their purchase or signing up for recurring bills. Normally when you think of ‘bad design,’ you think of the creator as being sloppy or lazy—but without ill intent. Dark patterns, on the other hand, are not mistakes. They’re carefully crafted with a solid understanding of human psychology, and they do not have the user’s interests in mind. The thing about dark patterns is that you design them from the exact same rulebooks that we use to enhance usability.”


5 @mattppeckham, “Google Says Those Who Email Gmail Users Have ‘No Legitimate Expectation of Privacy’.”

6 While tempting, a discussion of the American NSA ubiquitous surveillance efforts will have to wait for another day.
coupled with repetitive attempts to undermine, display, and obfuscate so-called privacy settings, would seem disingenuous at best, and willfully blind at worst. These online platforms profit from publicity and suffer from stringent privacy protocols—their whole raison d’être is to learn as much as possible about users in order to aggregate and then sell such profiled and clustered information to advertisers and marketers. Can we really conclude that such businesses violate users’ privacy when their platforms are in the first and last instance wired for ubiquitous publicity? Or more to the point, do privacy-based perspectives provide an adequate framework for understanding users’ relationships with social media platforms and their parent companies?

In lieu of criticizing social media platforms for transgressing the privacy of users, in recognizing the core business model of social media as a monetization of personal information, this paper calls into question how the push to “go public” on social media is governed, encouraged, enumerated, and profited upon. Clearly much participation on social media involves attention seeking, a search for recognition. With the diversification and multiplication of media spaces and an intensified 24/7 always-on form of communication (Crary 2013), users now go public in exceptionally bland and repetitive ways, signaling in a sense that they are up-to-date, digitally literate, and plugged in. Users are in other words now compelled to go public, and often.

Yet there remain important questions about this intense impulse and push to “go public” with all things shocking and banal, shared information and content that at the very least complicates the privacy axiom that one should be able to control one’s personal information. Social media in other words is principally designed as a space of publicity, a place where one is encouraged (subtly or not) to divulge personal information, subtly or explicitly, knowingly or not. Again, this is not to suggest that there should not be limits on how personal information is collected and used, or that users should not be made aware of data use policies. The aim here is not to reject the importance of privacy-related matters; users clearly should have knowledge and some degree of control over their own personal information. The case is more that social media and search engines such as Google have so clearly and consistently designed their sites and platforms to make information visible, to harness and publicize the contributions of users, to such an extent that their existence (and profitability, of course) now derives from systematically rejecting the very concept of privacy. To consistently reject or ignore this publicity imperative is to reject the fundamental political economy of social media today.

Users should know about their privacy rights, and the possible implications of the loss of control over personal information, but in the new age
of social media publicity, the new age of going public, users would also be well served with an understanding of the rules (or lack thereof) by which their demographic profiles and uploaded contributions are made public, when, where, and for how long. Some may see this position as merely an inversion of the privacy debate at best, or at worst an admission that social media has triumphed in the battle for control of personal information—a position heightened by the infamous and boastful claim by Sun Microsystems CEO Scott McNealy that “You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it” (Sprenger 1999). Neither is the case. Rather, what follows suggests that the focus on individual privacy, of individual ownership over one’s personal information (that can be extracted as surplus value as more orthodox Marxists have argued), merely reinforces the myth of individual agency, control, and ownership on social media, a myth perpetuated by the hyper-personalized content of ‘friend’ networks, first-person interfaces of social media platforms, personalized search engines, and other digital media platforms (smart phones, gaming platforms, and so forth), to the detriment of knowing how such platforms are economically designed to generate value and distribute social and economic capital. What is desperately needed today is not yet more theories and perspectives of surveillance, narrowly defined by the loss of control over personal information, a loss of privacy, but rather new theoretical frameworks and concepts that recognize how user knowledge, control, and participation is managed in a regime of corporatized publicity as such platforms and businesses themselves “go public” on stock markets. Such a framework would need to take into account how social media corporations intensify and multiply their efforts at commercializing and monetizing their core “holdings” or assets—users, their content, and the information derived from their behaviors—revenue streams and other market indicators that potentially create value for their now public shareholders.

Looking beyond the hyper-personalized social media interface and seemingly personalized advertisements, we find that the information economy of social media is an aggregated one, which is to say that clusters or profiles of users form the basic economic unit of the ecosystem. Users are not sold to advertisers, their demographics and psychographics (behaviors, likes, dislikes) are first matched with other like-mined and minded individuals (Elmer 2004, Turow 2008). And while much effort is now expended on tracking and

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7 In addition to arguing that users’ surplus labour is exploited, Marxist critic Christian Fuchs (2010) mirrors concerns from privacy advocates, claiming that: “Under our current modern circumstances, large collections of personal information pose the threat of harm to individuals because their foes, opponents, or rivals in private or professional life can potentially gain access to such data” (p. 293).
influencing opinion leaders on social media, such individuals are located and tracked through their relationships with other users and media objects—they are aggregated sources of knowledge.

The goal at hand then is one of accounting, one of enumerating such relationships, clusters, and flows of information, of understanding the means by which users’ publicity is managed, monitored and factored into the larger social media ecosphere. This paper argues that the current double imperative to go public on/for social media platforms and businesses is an effort at installing a regime of accountability (literally, a process of accounting), one that strives to define and categorize its components or “holdings,” while simultaneously offering a political and economic rationale of transparency and legitimacy (indeed a set of practices that purport to police and regulate this new transparent milieu). This paper thus rethinks the surveillance—or better still dataveillance literature (Clarke 1988)—to refocus attention on the rationale for going public, not as an evisceration of private spheres, but as a means of conceptualizing the management of an aggregated publicity, focusing in particular on how users are accounted for in—and by—social media.

The Panopticon Goes Public

In an effort at outlining the importance of going public in the social media age this paper returns to the seminal work of Michel Foucault, a philosopher whose work on disciplinary societies has provided a rich metaphor and model for the understanding of the architecture of monitoring or surveillance, and the subsequent forms of social control that result. The discussion, however, is not limited to Foucault’s panopticon writings; rather, what is suggested is a re-reading of the original conception of the panopticon offered by Jeremy Bentham, the English social reformer who took his own case for a prison public. The goal herein is to investigate how Bentham’s work advances an understanding of the panopticon, not merely as a site of ubiquitous surveillance, but as an institution that could serve as a model for managerial transparency, as a humane, open, and public form of social reform.

The panopticon prison has served as a common theoretical point of departure for surveillance studies (Lyon 1994, Gandy 1993), particularly for those concerned with the rise of systems and logics of pervasive social monitoring. Widely popularized by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the idea for a panopticon prison was originally conceived by English social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) in the form of a series of letters and an architectural drawing. Bentham’s panopticon writings were much more than a
theory of power; they also served as a political and economic appeal for support from the English aristocracy (among others), and a liberal reform agenda. Foucault’s (1977) interpretation of the panopticon, however, has in large part taken center stage in theoretical debates within the surveillance studies literature because of its theoretical connotation of ubiquity and automation—a technology/architecture that is designed to impel its subjects (prisoners) to self-policing their behavior. Such a powerful technological symbol has provided for a more robust, post-Orwellian vision restricted to the totalitarian state, which in the Reagan years served as an obvious substitute for Soviet Communism and its attendant forms of oppression and coercion. And while there have been growing calls for a rethinking or even displacement of Foucault’s panopticon writing as a means of opening up theoretical perspectives on contemporary forms of monitoring and surveillance, much work remains focused on surveillance as a process of watching or intelligence gathering, in short, a foil for fears over privacy transgressions.

This paper suggests that one way to open up a political economy of surveillance and social monitoring, again particularly in the context of the rise and widespread uptake of social media platforms and the double move to “go public” (by users/through IPO financing of businesses), is to return to Bentham’s initial thoughts and motivations for his panopticon prison—a perspective deeply rooted in a promise of transparency, publicity, and accountability. The panopticon as both an architectural drawing and a set of letters, as interpreted by Foucault from Bentham, remains largely unexplored.

Kevin Gandy (1993) was among the very first and most important surveillance studies authors to gloss over the liberal motivations of Bentham in the seminal manuscript, The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information. The book begins with the notation that “It is from Foucault that I derive the underlying concept of panopticism...” Gandy then goes on to briefly note that “The Panopticon is the name given by Jeremy Bentham to the design for a prison...” (my emphasis, p. 9). And while the default focus on Foucault’s panopticon continues in surveillance studies, one notable exception to the rule proves illustrative. Bart Simon (2002) writes:

While poignant, the social-material architecture of Foucault’s version of Bentham’s Panopticon produces a kind of double vision; two different and sometimes divergent stories of the development of distinctly modern relations of surveillance,

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8 Kevin Haggerty (2006), for example, offers an engaging polemic on the limitations of the Foucauldian panopticon in surveillance studies.
9 Wood (2007) also briefly notes this oversight.
control and domination. First there is the story of what goes on with the supervisor or inspector in the central tower and second there is a tale of what happens to the person in the cell (the inmate, the patient, the worker, the student). The story of the supervisor takes us to a discussion of techniques of observation, information gathering, data management, simulation…. (p. 4)

Here Simon latches on to a key difference in emphasis between Bentham’s panopticon and that interpreted by Foucault—a near inverted interest in the tower and its occupants in the case of the former, and of course the latter’s stated interest in prisoner’s self-management, their assumption that they could be under surveillance at any given time by those in the central inspection tower. Having raised the question of supervision within the functioning of the panoptic prison, however, Simon glosses over Bentham’s larger social and economic goals, his reformist-liberal agenda. In lieu of following through with his reading of Bentham, Simon turns back to Foucault’s agenda and words. He writes:

For Bentham supervision is ultimately necessary only to direct the system, detect any transgression and to make good on the promise of retribution. Without this, the inmate, worker, schoolchild, patient, etc…. would have nothing to fuel his imagination to keep himself in check. The supervisor’s role in such a system is thus quite minor and easily automated such that “any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine” (Foucault 1977: 202). (p. 11)

Limited in its intent and outlook on the liberal project of utilitarianism, Simon’s use of Bentham to reaffirm Foucault’s biopolitical thesis is at least one step in the right direction. Much surveillance studies literature conversely overwhelmingly treats Bentham as little more than an aside in discussions of surveillance and social monitoring, conveniently dispelling the importance of Foucault’s selective interpretation of Bentham’s original text, the result being a focus on the automated collection of personal information (and concomitant concerns with privacy forthwith). Nevertheless, a reading of the original panopticon writings is key to appreciating not only Foucault’s critique of, but, more importantly for this paper, Bentham’s insights on publicity and accountability.

To this end we need to recognize that Bentham’s panoptic inspector is not a minor character; rather, he is as central as the prisoners to the goal of opening up the carceral enterprise, of taking the prison public, making its machinations seemingly efficient, transparent, and accountable. Bentham’s
panopticon insists upon the apparent “omnipresence” of the inspector to avoid coercive forms of punishment, yet he also continuously notes throughout the letters that inspection has a “real presence” (p. 45). A recognition of Bentham-Foucault as being in conversation on technologies of liberalism, thus offers insights on both the dangers of removing private spaces and control/ownership mechanisms over personal information, and the rationality of going public, the mechanisms put in place to account for appeals to the public (again in the form of communication, and/or wider forms of economic investment).

Bentham’s (1995) panoptic writings were articulated in a rather unique form, published as a series of letters and an architectural drawing of a prison. Moreover, for Bentham they served as a set of proposals that were used to seek political and financial support for the building of the panoptic prison. In modern day terms they served in part as a financial prospectus—a document that outlined the business case, the value-added proposition for potential investors. The document offers over twenty-one letters, articulating both rhetorical claims and historical contexts. The letters are brief and businesslike, almost memo-like in their intent and focus. The building or prison itself is sold to potential investors and supporters through the use of strong visual imagery of sightlines and architectural viewpoints. The brevity of the letters in the aggregate suggests a schematic plan, a set of steps required to bring the proposal to fruition, including providing engineering-like precision—exact measurements for an entire building.

More to the point, the second of Bentham’s panopticon letters offers a compelling series of remarks on the central inspector’s tower, a site largely ignored by Foucault and consequently by many surveillance studies scholars. For Bentham, the tower served much more than just an observatory center; it also doubled as a residence: “The apartment of the inspector occupies the centre; you may call it if you please the ‘inspector’s lodge’” (p. 35). Bentham further explains that as a familial, domestic space, the lodge plays a key role in the efficient monitoring of the inmates: “A very material point is that room be allotted to the lodge, sufficient to adapt it to the purpose of a complete and constant habitation for the principal inspector or head keeper, and his family. The more numerous also the family, the better; since, by this means, there will in fact be as many inspectors, as the family consists of persons, though only one will be paid for it” (p. 44). Bentham, in short, explained how and why the inspector and family were themselves made complicit in the automatic functioning of the prison:

Secluded oftentimes, by their situation, from every other object, they [inspector and family] will naturally, and in a
manner unavoidably give their eyes a direction conformable to that purpose, in every momentary interval of their ordinary occupations. It will supply in their instance the place that great and constant fund of entertainment to the sedentary and vacant in towns—the looking out of the window. The scene, though a confined, would be a very various, and therefore, perhaps, not altogether an amusing one. (p. 45)

In Bentham’s panopticon, then, the inspector and family are themselves effectively isolated, segregated, or, some might conclude, jailed, a set of characteristics more commonly associated with Foucault’s prisoners. There is seemingly little else to do but watch, which for Bentham seems to strike a rather amusing chord. More importantly, one could argue that for Bentham’s broader reformist purposes, the family of “watchers” also serve as panoptic subjects, though not ones whose privacy is invaded necessarily or who are put under the glare of potential 24/7 surveillance. Rather, for Bentham, the panopticon served to free both prisoners and its staff, including the inspector, from overt forms of discipline, coercion, and violence. On a broader institutional point, Bentham thus concludes that the inspector is freed from the burden of being subject to oversight (from judges and the like), to such an extent that the transparency of the building “…ought to be thrown wide open to the body of the curious at large—the great open committee of the tribunal of the world” (p. 48).

The Promise of Accountability

Bentham’s panopticon, as an effort at rethinking punishment and the management thereof, calls into question the means through which other institutions, staff, customers, clients and others are called upon to “go public,” to make their operations not just transparent, but by extension, politically and economically accountable. If Foucault’s panopticon automated an internalization of power, it should be similarly noted that Bentham’s building automated the process of accountability—that the management of punishment was held to account by the architectural transparency of the building itself. Remember, the panopticon was itself an effort to make more efficient and less costly the process of incarceration and punishment. Scholars of financial accounting have long noted Bentham’s broader interests in governmental forms of accounting, transparency, and publicity. Gallhofer and Haslam (2009), for example, argue that for Bentham “Accounting and publicity is … a key

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10 For a discussion of reality TV and surveillance, see Mathiesen (1997) and Andrejevic (2004).
principle of management or governance, second only to [his] broad-ranging Panopticon principle” (p. 489). The authors, moreover, suggest that Bentham’s bridging of transparency, publicity, and accountability offers an emancipatory framework for the working classes and underprivileged of the 1700s, an effort at exposing the transgressions of the ruling classes.

We do know, however, through writings co-authored with his brother Samuel, that Jeremy Bentham anticipated the professionalization of accounting and its complex system of language. Gallhofer and Haslam (1999) note that “consistent with a discourse concerned to promote democracy, in their accounting texts the Benthams sought to pursue a critique of accounting language. Their concern was to simplify and de-mystify the language of accounting, ‘correcting; accounting ‘in its language’, rendering it more comprehensive and clearer in the public realm” (p. 98). Gallhofer and Haslam also remind us that Bentham conceived of accounting as a moral enterprise, one that, like his panopticon, required an “inspective” gaze, while also engaging in “information-elicitative reporting” (p. 98).

The notion of information-elicitative reporting is an intriguing one, suggesting that the language of accounting and the broader regime of accountability were not restricted to a transparency language, a simplified system of meaning. Rather, the Benthams’ use of the concept of elicitative reporting suggesting a more instrumental perspective on information and accounting, one that would not just infer meaning, but make public social, political, and economic relationships.

Mary Poovey (1998) has argued, post-reformation, that numbers, figures, and mathematics soon occupied this promised space—or more aptly put, language—of transparency, with accounting balance sheets, terms and techniques serving as a rhetorical and deeply flawed form of publicity. Crucially, then, for Poovey:

the questions to be addressed in a history of numeracy (such as Who counted? What did people count? For what social and institutional purposes did people count? And with what financial backing were large-scale counting projects inaugurated?) are now and probably will always be unanswerable. (p. 5)

Poovey’s skepticism over this new regime of accountability is not merely a concern with the epistemology of accounting and its ability to elide true/factual relationships, nor is it necessarily a concern with access to appropriate historical documentation. Rather, for Poovey, accounting, or better still
accountability, as an adjunct to a purported transparent technology or field, is best understood as a managerial tool, as an effort at managing perceptions, trust, and confidence in those who oversaw the massive amount of capital investments (and reinvestments, maintenance, operations, etc.) needed during the industrial revolution—particularly with the growth of modern railways.

While Poovey incorporates Bentham’s elicitative definition of pre-industrial accounting methods, she suggests that it merely serves to obfuscate, and constantly redraw and redefine economic relationships—that is, to elide the field of accountability, to displace the ability to hold anything or anyone to account. It is exactly this machinic or diagrammatic process that Gilles Deleuze (1988) invoked in his critique of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish—that Foucault’s focus on the panoptic mold negated an understanding of its social and economic modulations in the society of control.

The term diagram, however, is ironically one that is first offered by Foucault in his own attempts to generalize the disciplinary effects of the panopticon. For Foucault the panopticon served as a metaphor. It was not to be coupled with—or reliant upon—the very act of watching any one individual; it was conceived as a social logic. Foucault thus dubbed the panopticon a “laboratory of power,” not only to highlight its experimental nature, but also to indicate its continuous search for improvement, its “gains in efficiency.” (p. 204). But most importantly for Foucault, “the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use” (my emphasis, p. 205).

Building upon the diagrammatic and elicitative perspectives, Karl Palmås (2011) has argued that contemporary information economies engage in intensified forms and practices of surveillance—invoking the new found mantra of “big data.” Building upon panoptic theories from Bentham through to Deleuze, Palmås echoes the words of Foucault, arguing that from a panoptic perspective “corporations function as laboratories” (p. 349). In so doing, Palmås invokes Manuel DeLanda’s (1991) “panspectron.” He writes: “In contrast to the original panoptic architectures, the panspectron monitors a wider segment of frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum. In other words, the panspectron not only registers that which is visible to the human eye but also radio, radar, microwaves and so on” (p. 343).

Returning to the notion of transparency offered by Bentham and that tempered by Poovey’s discussion of the promise of accounting, a panspectric
surveillance or system of accounting strives to not only continuously collect personal information, but also to expand the field of data collection, and in so doing, seeks to establish emergent relationships and patterns in the past, present, and in a simulational context, in the future (see also Elmer & Opel 2008). So again, what panspectric surveillance offers us is a search for economic relationships (profiles, clusters, and the like), not individuals per se, but aggregated publics. This elicitative view of surveillance/accounting, moreover, serves as much more than a personal interface with capital, most commonly articulated in the terms of accounts (banks, phone companies, and the like), or as amplified by first-person interfaces on social networking sites, handheld smartphones, and gaming consoles and their attendant terms of service. Rather, what De Landa and Palmás’s panspectral perspective suggests is again a rather insidious push to go public, to be enumerated without ever having even “signed up” for such an account. In such a regime one is accounted for even in one’s absence from a platform or system—an expansion of the “range of perception” outside of the mythological contractual relationship between business and individual.

**Conclusions**

The need to rethink the terms of accountability on and across social media, information aggregation sites, and software/hardware companies, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, Apple, and Microsoft, has grown exponentially with the rise of user-generated content and a string of recent IPOs. It is this coupling of the terms of going public—both for users on such platforms and technologies—and investment seeking processes, that continue to redefine relationships between new media users and corporations. It is no coincidence that Facebook, and, in short order—at the time of writing this article—Twitter have stepped up efforts at constantly rewriting their data use policies so as to aggressively increase their efforts at collecting and aggregating ever more subtle, incremental, and social data on human life (Kanalley 2013). And while some of these data-use changes are communicated to users, options for users are made difficult to find, or otherwise degrade the intended functionality of such platforms (that is, one of public recognition and visibility). Some claim that such changes cross the line—that is, they impinge upon the privacy of its users. And clearly there are many examples that support such claims. That said, as businesses that create value through a regime of publicity, this paper has suggested a new route—a recognition that the business models of such companies are inexplicably tied to, if not defined by, their rejection of privacy and their intense embracing of all things uploaded, shared, commented upon,
browsed, searched for, uploaded, etcetera, etcetera. These are the new sites of (human) accounting, these sites of potential value—or holdings. What’s more, these sites are in constant flux, particularly as a larger elicitative apparatus seeks to both draw out and redefine political and economic relationships.

A rethinking and re-reading of the panopticon through its initial author, Jeremy Bentham—admittedly as popularized by Foucault, Deleuze, De Landa, and the burgeoning field of surveillance studies—provides a starting point, a broader economic recognition of the panopticon writings and drawings as both political and economic documents. Politically, Bentham sought to expose the prison to the world through an architecture of transparency, one that would have both prison and inspector freed from coercive oversight. Foucault, of course, tempered such a project, focusing on the subtle form of self-management that such an apparatus invoked in its subjects. As we have seen, Bentham too recognized that such a system was not without its flaws—or rather, its promises—and it is here where he makes the turn from punishment, management, and transparency to a concern with accountability as a matter of language and economy. For Bentham, accounting served as a potential check on the powerful, though one that had even in his time been obfuscated by complicated terms and formats. Economically, Bentham argued like Foucault after him that the panopticon served to make punishment more efficient, and consequently its efforts at transparency would also inform his concerns with accounting as an elicitative form of surveillance—one that did not only collect information on individuals, but sought to establish links between and among economic agents and their many transactions.

It is at this stage where we see the importance and relevance of elicitative accounting and surveillance to privacy advocates and some Marxist social media critics who try to hold to account the machinations of the new digital corporation and their many demographic, psychographic, and profile hungry platforms. (Fuchs, 2010) By focusing on the subjects of surveillance, and not their aggregated relationships, such critics’ appeal for accountability continues to miss the mark. Such platforms, in the literal sense of the word, merely serve as the jumping-off point for a system of accounting, a means not just of defining the terms of potential value, but also the ongoing relationships among such sources of data (the building blocks of user profiles and psychographic clusters). Lastly, as a platform of accounting, this elicitative form of surveillance (which shares some components with De Landa’s panspectron), more importantly seeks to redefine and obfuscate the means of accountability itself—displacing the ability to redress ethical, political, and economic transgressions. Such transgressions are thus not merely directed against the individual, rather, they set the terms for a broader ethical potential.
for digital and networked media, one where intent, responsibility, and the like, are forever being rewritten, in terms of use, or by automated forms of aggregation and the algorithmic governance of such platforms.
Works Cited


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RESILIENCE VERSUS RESISTANCE: AFFECTIVELY MODULATING CONTEMPORARY DIAGRAMS OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE, SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

PETRA HROCH

[Narrator]: California is a strong brand: the place of dreams, movie stars, and new beginnings, with a heavenly climate. [At the same time], the Golden State is running out of money and so is the city of Los Angeles. Public services are being cut, unemployment is rising, and many people have lost their homes in the economic crisis. But optimism and belief in the power of America seem unaffected. Who are the pioneers of the new America-in-the-making, and how do they see the future?

—Bregtje van der Haak, California Dreaming (2010)

The above narration—together with a backdrop of images of beach-side stands selling knick-knacks—sets the scene for Dutch filmmaker Bregtje van der Haak’s 2010 documentary, California Dreaming. Shot in sunny Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, the documentary explores some of the ways American individuals, families, and organizations have been managing the ongoing aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. As a European documentary filmmaker in California, van der Haak becomes fascinated by the transcontinental difference in approaches toward the fiscal crisis and its resulting issues. She is familiar with what she describes as a “typical” European response to current social, political, and economic problems: blaming the government as the source of the problem and expecting the government to fix it (van der Haak 2010b). Although she finds that Californians enduring the US financial meltdown are
suffering as much as their Europeans counterparts embroiled in the EU fiscal crisis, she remarks at the surprising difference in their responses to the crisis: “Americans are optimistic, not like Europeans, who are always complaining” (van der Haak 2010a).

In *California Dreaming*, van der Haak interviews Californians who have lost their homes and jobs as a result of the housing market crash. She also profiles those trying to reintegrate into society in the midst of the recession after losing all or part of their lives to the state’s for-profit prison sector and the “three-strikes law”—a law that can result in life imprisonment for repeat non-serious and non-violent offenses. Most of the people interviewed, although they have first-hand evidence that there is something wrong with the system, do not, as van der Haak observes, hold the government responsible for faulty policies. Nor do they demand reforms. Rather, they tend to blame and be ashamed of themselves, maintain an unflinching faith in meritocracy, and reaffirm their positive, optimistic, and can-do attitude and belief in the American Dream. They resolve to “pull-up their bootstraps” and look to their own capacities, families, and communities for survival strategies and potential solutions.¹

So, although *California Dreaming* focuses on the potential benefits of optimism as a positive affect leading to resilience, it simultaneously complicates normative narratives and assumptions that optimism is necessarily desirable for social change (and conversely, that pessimism, or complaining is not). Indeed, the documentary title, *California Dreaming*, itself can be read as having a double valence of meaning: on the one hand, it reinforces the positive, optimistic nature of the California brand as the place of dreams and possibilities, and, on the other hand, it suggests that Californians who buy into this branded identity, this belief, are dreaming—that California’s optimistic citizens might in fact be inattentive to reality, engaging in delusional fantasies, or impeded in their ability to think critically.

In what follows, I offer a critique of the increasingly popular contemporary rhetoric of “social resilience,” “social sustainability,” and “social innovation.” My suggestion is that despite the apparent relevance, urgency, and innovative veneer of these concepts—concepts that have come to the fore in the face of cascading ecological and economic crises—they nonetheless operate on subjects and communities affectively, and perpetuate the very status quo policies, practices, and programs that have contributed to our moment of crisis in the first place. I begin with a description of some of the activities of the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references to van der Haak refer to her documentary film, *California Dreaming* (2010a).
Californians profiled in van der Haak’s *California Dreaming*. Their activities anecdotally illustrate some of the acceptable responses to crises that are available to today’s necessarily enterprising subjects. Next, I outline the problem of locating agency in the individual as a response to a systemic crisis—a crisis that itself placed responsibility upon individuals while simultaneously disempowering them (too-big-to-fail became not a descriptive but a performative statement). Finally, using Foucault’s work on the “self” as an enterprise (Foucault 2010; McNay 2009) and Deleuze’s work on the “dividual” (Deleuze 1992), I discuss the subject-system relation characteristic of contemporary “diagrams” of control (Deleuze 1992). My objective here is to emphasize the way in which affect is central to the modulation of today’s crisis-filled event and serves as a means of bolstering existing flows of power and/or forces of transformation. I critically connect this analysis of affect to today’s rhetoric of “resilience” and argue that although resilience-focused activities are characterized by an emphasis on production rather than consumption, and community participation rather than individual action, they nonetheless serve to perpetuate dominant neoliberal values such as entrepreneurialism, market-based decision making, and privatization. Finally, I sketch the criteria for what “resistance” might look like in a diagram of control in which social resilience is emerging as an imperative.

**Affectively Intensifying the Status Quo: A New America-in-the-Making**

In *California Dreaming*, some of the grassroots community initiatives created by and for the Californians van der Haak describes as “pioneers of the new America-in-the making” include: (1) The New Beginnings Safe Parking Program, a program that points people who are living out of their cars to registered “safe” parking lots where they can spend the night without being disturbed, ticketed, or towed; (2) Homeboy Industries, a program that helps ex-gang members who have been recently released from prison to reintegrate into society by providing services such as laser removal of tattoos and gang markings, counselling, and job training; (3) The Jobs Club, a program that helps people without employment find work; (4) Fallen Fruit, an urban fruit-picking art project; and (5) a commune created by a group of thirty-somethings based on what architect/founder Laura Burkhalter calls “practical” rather than “ideological” principles, such as having people grow their own food and live communally.

Although the European and American financial crises have a variety of underlying causes, and although these causes are differently constructed in and through various media, whether people come to consider the source of the
problems and solutions to be individual or social points to an issue just as critical as what the root causes of these issues really are or how the roots of these issues are constructed in dominant narratives. How people construe an understanding of their own agency, how they internalize dominant affective norms, and how they imagine their relationship to these complex issues is intimately related to how they consider themselves as capable of acting or reacting. The stories of people managing the consequences of financial crises that van der Haak presents tell us about the ways different contemporary mappings of power—or neoliberal diagrams—modulate subjectivity in relation to social, economic, and ecological truths. These stories also reveal the need to account for affective economies when engaging in political and economic critiques. In other words, these stories highlight the importance of the modulation of affect as a key component of the modulation of power and its material effects.

The initiatives highlighted by van der Haak in *California Dreaming* reflect the kinds of citizen-led social programs popping up to fill social needs in cash-strapped cities and regions around the world. Although these efforts address a variety of problems and provide a range of services, they can be grouped into activities that are increasingly being referred to by business and design schools, local and regional governments, development agencies, and international governance institutions (such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund) as examples of “social resilience” (Meybeck et al. 2012; World Bank 2013a; Zhu 2012), “social sustainability” (Lipsky 2009; World Bank 2013b), or “social innovation” (OECD, LEED Program n.d.; World Bank 2011). Such activities, as I will argue here, reveal the catastrophic failure of—and, paradoxically, the re-emergence of faith in—what Foucault and Deleuze identify as the neoliberal, individualized/individualizing, enterprising subject as the locus of social, economic, ecological, and political agency.

At the heart of the paradox I am describing is the fact that, while the neoliberal capitalist game has been revealed to be in crisis, this crisis has led to greater insistence that we ought to have intensified faith in the status quo and the same rules of play. As we know, the global financial crisis and its ongoing fallout have revealed that corporations and banks cannot be left to regulate themselves, that they cannot be entrusted to impose their own checks and balances, and that there is no such thing as a benevolent “invisible hand” of the market. Indeed, the demands for government-funded (i.e., taxpayer-funded) bank bailouts and quantitative easing (QE) programs have shown that even those CEOs and central bankers who profess faith in the free market do not believe in “allowing the market to decide” when it comes to its own survival. In
other words, even the invisible hand reaches out for a helping hand after it stretches too far, risks too much, crashes, and falls. In the United States, the “too-big-to-fail” banks that approved the risky (and often predatory) sub-prime loans were bailed out by citizens, while the citizens, teetering on the brink of losing their homes in the sub-prime mortgage crisis, were left bankrupt and homeless. This socialization of losses and the privatization of gains made plain that, as critics of globalized capitalism have long argued, the free market was never free to begin with (or at least, that “free” here has a contested meaning). As the bailouts revealed, there was one set of free market rules for the private sector (when the private sector fails, it is protected by the security of public funds) and another set of rules for the public (when private individuals fail, as the foreclosures revealed, they are left to fend for themselves and be “resilient” in the face of the ongoing market insecurities). The risks and liberties taken advantage of by the private sector were backstopped by the very social safety net the private sector so often targets for destruction via privatization. The paradoxes abound and yet the same hard-working, enterprising, individual subject who has been systematically disempowered by the mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism finds him/herself, as the crisis unfolds, with seemingly no alternative to having to intensify his/her actions as a hard-working, enterprising, individual in the face of social, political, economic, or environmental situations that are increasingly out of (his or her) control. Individual and social resilience as the imperative, appropriate response forecloses the alternative: resistance. Obligatory optimism marginalizes complaints and critiques, and an over-emphasis on individual responsibility obfuscates the need to hold responsible those who have the greatest power to make decisions to transform a given situation.

If, as Deleuze writes, “there is no diagram that does not also include, besides the points which it connects up, certain relatively free points, points of creativity, change and resistance” (Deleuze 1992, 44), how can analysis of these shifting—and indeed shifty—subjective-social diagrams of power help us identify expressions of resistance? Can we, or, how can we, make distinctions about which actions/reactions are acts of so-called resilience and which are acts of resistance? Moreover, what constitutes this difference? How can we find the pressure points that, if targeted, might transform a configuration of subjectivity designed to capitulate to what Foucault called power-over (potestas) into a site from which that subject has the capacity to express power-to (potentia)—a power to reshape not only itself but also the broader social and political field (Braidotti 1994; 2012)?

I am engaging here with intrastitial affective spaces as constitutive and constructive of power relations in order to analyze evolving neoliberal diagrams
and to remap new cartographies of power (Braidotti 2012) of what I call intensive resistances. More specifically, my main interest is to interrogate critically three contemporary imperatives that describe and prescribe the actions of contemporary neoliberal agents: the imperative of social resilience, social sustainability, and social innovation. I argue that resilience, sustainability, and innovation can be thought of as “schizoid” (Deleuze 1983; 1988) modes of expressing what Deleuze calls “the cliché” (Deleuze 2004, 57) as “the new” (Deleuze 1994, vii)—that is, that these are variously modulated expressions of the authority of the same masquerading as difference. The indirect effect of this short-circuiting is that any actual possibility of resistance qua social transformation is rendered imperceptible and un-actualizable. I am interested in connecting this tension to the work of Deleuze, who, though he takes a more posthumanist approach than Foucault in his analysis of power relations, also engages with precisely this dilemma: can, or, how can, the individual subject composed by the neoliberal diagram be the site from which that dividuated mode of subjectivity, as well as the broader neoliberal structure, be challenged? If, in Deleuze, the subject is always an assemblage of forces and flows, a material, mediated, and modulated entity, a singular multiplicity, what does it mean for that subject to transduce the always-already into something that is not-yet? And how does this transformation in turn exceed the individual subject and also shift the social and political diagram?

Many of the responses to the problems of social sustainability in the context of a neoliberal governmentality classified under the overlapping terms of social resilience and social innovation are sustainable primarily in the sense that they reproduce, or sustain, dominant modes of existence—that is, they reproduce modes of so-called collective action by “dividualized” (Deleuze 1992) agents who, in expressing their supposed agency, reciprocally reinforce a realm in which collective responsibility is further individualized. This neoliberal diagram of power captures creative energies in service of the capitalist status quo. As I proceed, I want to draw out the double-edged meaning of social resilience (with its aim of resisting external change) and social innovation (with its aim to bring change about) in the context of social sustainability by analyzing the diagram of what these discourses seek to withstand (resilience), to create (innovation), and to maintain (sustainability). I ask: (1) How can critical analyses of this diagram of power help us to defragment, reformat, and recreate responsive and resistant cartographies? (2) Why is it vital that we understand resistance to neoliberal diagrams in intensive, matter-mediated-modulated, non-binary modes?
Self-Styling in the Shanty Town: Social Resilience, Social Sustainability, and Social Innovation

Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt. It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explorations within shanty towns or ghettos.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 6–7)

To illustrate these ideas more concretely, I’d like to return to California, and revisit more specifically a few of the case studies upon which van der Haak focuses in her exploration of the popular response to the financial crisis. In the opening few scenes, van der Haak encounters L.A. firefighters collecting money for the fire department from cars stopped at an intersection. When asked why they’re in need of money, one of the firefighters describes the cutbacks to the fire department. Shocked by hearing this news of cutbacks to what she considers one of the most essential emergency services provided by a local government, van der Haak interviews Wendy Greuel, city controller (and mayoral candidate), who describes the depth of the debt problem including L.A. County’s half-billion dollar deficit, their non-existent emergency reserve fund, and the extent of the debt crisis beyond the city, the state, and the country as a whole. Upon describing the severity of the problem, she warns, as if anticipating what van der Haak might come to observe in her interaction with people living through the crisis, “we can be eternally optimistic, but if optimism is blinding you then this is a revolving-door problem.”

In the next scene, Roslyn Scheuerman, a social worker with the New Beginnings Safe Parking Program goes knocking “door-to-door” on the RV, bus, and car windows of people who have lost their homes to the banks—people whose former occupations include the self-described “former software engineer and CEO of a major .com” as well as “Dan Rather’s former editor.” Although she maintains a sunny disposition, the social worker admits that some of the people who have lost their jobs and are living out of their cars are “very depressed.” When van der Haak asks her, “Don’t you think the city government should be taking care of these people?” she responds by saying that she “[doesn’t] think it’s up to the government” because “the government doesn’t
have money.” Instead, she thinks that “it’s going to take more people being part of the solution” and doing some “creative thinking.”

The next series of scenes features interviews with a young family—a college-educated woman who lost her job as a hotel receptionist and a college-educated man who lost his job as an electrician, who are living out of an RV with their two young boys. These interviews reveal a similar reluctance to hold any level of government responsible for their loss of employment and the loss of their home. We see the family driving to a parking lot that is part of the Safe Parking Program as the young mother explains how shocked she is that in California, the seventh largest economy in the world, she sees so many people living in their cars or RVs. When asked whether she’s angry with somebody for ending up like this, she says she “can’t be mad at anybody” because the employers who let them go “were really nice.” And they “can’t really blame themselves” because, despite “[trying] their best,” they couldn’t manage to accumulate enough savings to continue to make ends meet after they lost their jobs. She observes that she sees class divisions widening—that the people without money are doing worse and becoming more desperate while the people with money are doing better—and also remarks that “the middle rung is gone.”

Looking hesitantly at her partner, she cautiously ventures what he might perceive to be a radical remark when she says, “in history this is never good.” When van der Haak asks about her biggest fear, the young mother tearfully confides that she is afraid that her kids will be embarrassed about their family situation in front of other kids at school and ashamed of their parents if they’re still living “this way” when they are old enough to realize it. The young father responds to the question, and to her admission of fear, by saying, in contrast, that he “doesn’t look at life as fears” but rather as “challenges.” The next morning we see him riding his bike to The Jobs Club, a not-for-profit that teaches people who are out of work how to write resumes and provides Internet access for online job searches. He goes every day, despite the fact that, unlike the people to whom the service is targeted, he has a college degree, previous job experience, and job search skills.²

The Safe Parking Program and the Jobs Club are examples of the kind of social services that help people to be “resilient” in the face of an economic crisis by mitigating the effects of homelessness and unemployment for those

² In a later scene in California Dreaming we see a job fair sponsored by the Bank of America. When asked about people’s reaction to this job fair in an interview, van der Haak remarked that “people did not find anything strange here. Nobody blamed the banks. Nobody blamed anyone but themselves” (2010b).
already in desperate situations. In the documentary’s second part, van der Haak chronicles some programs that express the kind of “creative thinking” to which the social worker refers—programs that might look like they are less about surviving resiliently after-the-fact but more about innovating pre-emptively to build resilience not only for past and present but also future crises. Fallen Fruit, a public fruit-picking project in L.A., is one such project. Part performance art project, part environmental activist endeavour, and part social service, Fallen Fruit was founded by artists David Burns, Austin Young, and Matias Viegener, who noticed the abundance of fruit growing on public property around the city; taking advantage of the lack of a law regarding picking fruit growing on public land or reachable from a public sidewalk, they began to map the public fruit trees and bushes in the city in 2004.

David Burns of the Fallen Fruit collective notes that since the financial crisis people have become more interested in experiences than in acquiring objects, and that there is a greater sense of connectedness. Indeed, he shows the properties of some neighbours who have planted extra vegetables on the public property just beyond their sidewalks for public consumption. Noting that one-third of the people in L.A. do not have work, and that he was himself a university instructor for sixteen years but the California public university system recently cut his position, he explains that the public fruit program helped him find new work and job security and, simultaneously, helps other people find food security by having increased access to free local produce, including a range of citrus such as lemons, tangerines, naval oranges, blood oranges, grapefruit, as well as dragon fruit, tomatillos, tomatoes, peaches, broccoli, and artichokes.

Programs such as Fallen Fruit have taken root in other cities, including New York, Boston (Boston Area Gleaners), Berkeley, Santa Clara, Oakland (Forage Oakland), Philadelphia (The Philadelphia Orchard Project), Portland (The Portland Fruit Tree Project and Urban Edibles), San Francisco (Guerrilla Grafters), Atlanta (Concrete Jungle), Vancouver (Vancouver Fruit Tree Project), Hamilton (Hamilton Fruit Tree Project), and Toronto (Not Far from the Tree) (Eaton 2009). Toronto’s Not Far From the Tree, for example, maps fruit trees that property owners have offered to have picked and organizes volunteers to pick the fruit, which is then distributed in thirds: one-third to fruit tree owners, one-third to fruit pickers, and one-third to neighbourhood food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. The grassroots experiment in environmental and social sustainability started by Laura Reinsborough in 2008 has grown into an organization that in 2010 had mapped 228 fruit-bearing trees and bushes and hand-picked almost twenty thousand pounds of fruit in downtown Toronto. Not Far From the Tree’s harvest includes fruits as diverse
as cherries, apricots, plums, grapes, elderberries, pears, and apples. The organization’s mandate, to “put Toronto’s fruit to good use by picking and sharing the bounty,” is one example of an emerging environmentally sustainable social innovation sprouting up in cities worldwide (Not Far From the Tree 2011).

In a discussion paper presented at a design philosophy workshop at the Parsons New School for Design, leading theorist of design for social innovation Ezio Manzini, together with Virginia Tassarini, listed a range of initiatives similar to Not Far From the Tree that they consider examples of social innovation, defined broadly as “new ideas that work in meeting social goals” (Mulgan 2007, 9). Many of these actions may also be described as examples of social resilience or social sustainability and include initiatives such as:

- groups of families sharing services to reduce economic and environmental costs, while also improving neighbourhoods; new forms of social interchange and mutual help (such as time banks); systems of mobility that present alternatives to the use of individual cars (from car-sharing and car pooling to the rediscovery of bicycles); the development of productive activities based on local resources and skills that are linked into wider global networks (e.g., certain products of a specific place, or the fair and direct trade networks between producers and consumers established around the globe). The lists could continue, touching on every area of daily life and emerging all over the world. (Manzini and Tassarini 2012, 1)

Although I do not want to suggest that such practices of social innovation are all the same, nor that they are necessarily problematic in either their analyses of critical issues or their efforts to address them, I do want to suggest that these initiatives may unwittingly recreate the issues they seek to address. Are they indeed innovative, sustainable, or resilient while continuing to operate within the current dominant paradigm, or do they contribute to changing the broader social and economic structures that led to the need for their intervention? What broader systemic problems might these examples of social resilience, sustainability, and innovation inadvertently help to sustain? And despite—or perhaps even because of their existence—what broader diagrams of power are not resisted or transformed at all? In other words, when Manzini and Tassarini highlight that a main feature of “creative communities” and “the promising initiatives they generate” is that “they have grown out of problems posed by contemporary life,” we must ask whether the “sustainable solutions” they generate are sustainable in that they are merely adaptive to the new normal,
functioning as a temporary “patch,” as a downloading onto citizens the responsibility for problems that exist at scales beyond their scope, or whether they also call into question the root mechanisms that give rise to the creation of these problems (2012, 4). It seems to me that there is a fine line between sustainable social innovation as an adaptive behaviour that, in a sense, enables a system to continue to break down by putting temporary patches on inevitable, long-term, systemic problems and sustainable social innovation that questions, challenges, and resists the kinds of social, political, and economic changes that contribute to systemic breakdown in the first instance.

Moreover, despite Manzini and Tassarini’s claim that one of the characteristics of social innovation initiatives is that “citizens, associations, enterprises and local governments that conceive and set up new solutions” do so “by choice,” it is imperative to ask (and difficult to discern) what constitutes choice in many of the situations in which people find themselves today (2012, 4). As we see in many of van der Haak’s interviews with creative citizens, associations, and enterprises in California Dreaming, it is questionable whether people—whether they are engaging in activities focused on “survival” or “innovation”—have any significant choice at all (that is, choice powerful enough to significantly change their situation). Rather, despite the fact that we live a neoliberal diagram that perpetuates the myth that people are individual free agents that choose their failures and successes, when individuals find themselves in a situation in which they have no choice, it is framed, first of all, as the fault of the individual (or the culmination of poor previous choices), and, second, it is presented to the individual as just another fork in the road where choices must be made. In other words, even when faced with no real choices, the individual is expected to play into the pretense of choice and agency by, for instance, “choosing” to have a positive attitude, trying (even if in vain) to do something about the situation. This so-called choice, then, exists within a context in which individuals’ choices are sharply delimited. So strong is the imperative to be enterprising that no matter the real lack of choices, options, powers, and capacities, it is incumbent upon a good subject to participate in the fiction of actively making choices within what is in fact a diagrammatic blockade of agency. An individual is effectively expected to express freedom and agency within a context in which he/she has no access to power. Even if there is nothing that can be done to improve the situation, at the very least it is incumbent upon individuals to “stay positive,” remain “optimistic,” and continue to smile as they continue to strive. A person who pursues the alternative route—whether by admitting defeat, refusing to participate, complaining, or criticizing the overriding structure—risks being seen as a “bad
subject,” a “killjoy” (Ahmed 2010), as a threat to the system of enterprising activity, obligatory positive affect, and endless flexibility and adaptability.

The current expansion of the discourse of sustainability to include terms like resilience and innovation is reflective of the ways in which individuals and organizations are required to realign their orientations toward the mitigation of past, present, potential, and predetermined (in other words, all-pervasive) risks. The move from the rhetoric of sustainability toward the rhetoric of resilience reflects the shift in emphasis from looking for ways to keep up the status quo toward looking for ways to absorb potential shocks (as another way of maintaining the status quo), while the move from speaking about sustainability toward speaking about innovation uses creativity as a means of mitigating change (and quite possibly also maintaining the status quo). As shock-absorbing, status quo-maintaining, or forward-thinking as resilience, sustainability, and innovation, respectively, may sound, all three terms reflect the move from a proactive to a reactive subject position—one that may certainly be flexible, hardy, or creative, but not necessarily critical, let alone a threat to the established order of things.

Indeed, as critics of the concepts of social resilience, resilience thinking, and resilience policy and activism have recently pointed out, the application of the notion of resilience to the social sphere—a notion originally used to describe ecological systems—has “important limits” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 475). First, the practical relevance of the term is questionable due to the lack of clear distinction between the descriptive aspects or “specifications of what is the case” and normative aspects or “prescriptions of what ought to be the case or is desirable as such” (Brand and Jax 2007, 22). In addition to the problems associated with such normative claims, there is also an epistemological issue. Although the term resilience has the advantage of being a more holistic and complex approach to studying socioecological change (such as anthropogenic climate change) by “emphasiz[ing] feedback dynamics between social and ecological systems,” the extension of the term resilience from the ecological to the social realm “problematically assum[es] that social and ecological system dynamics” function in similar ways (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 475). As a result, the normative and epistemological limitations of the concept of social resilience does not account for the ways in which “power and competing value systems” are integral (rather than external) to social systems; nor does it account (nor allow) for social transformation in any significant sense (ibid.). Indeed, the term resilience as used by the social resilience proponents focuses more on “accommodating” changing conditions and new risks rather critiquing their root causes or imagining and acting upon alternatives (O’Brien 2012). Resilience thinking reproduces an inadequacy
common to a number of other approaches to risk science—namely, resilience theories “overemphasize” the role of “physical shocks” and “undertheorize” the importance of “political economic factors” in understanding “vulnerability” (Watts qtd. in Cote and Nightingale 2012, 478). This underlying assumption that shock is “natural” or “given” is problematic because it obscures the need to ask critical questions about power and to “unpack normative questions such as ‘resilience of what?’ and ‘for whom?’” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 479).

Similarly, Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson argue that resilience is a conservative concept when applied to social relations. Identifying it as the latest in a “long line of naturalistic metaphors” applied to the social sciences, and especially to cities and regions, the concept of resilience takes for granted and, in effect, naturalizes rather than problematizes resilience as a “common project” as well as existing social structures and relations that are to be mobilized in its pursuit (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 259). The rhetoric of resilience is thus fundamentally “anti-political” in the sense that it glosses over pre-existing social inequalities and “the role of the state and politics” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 259). Resilience may sound like a positive quality “imbued with notions of self-reliance and triumph over adversity” but, as MacKinnon and Derickson observe, this assumption overlooks its “affinities with neoliberal thinking” (2012, 259) that privileges market rationalities over social needs and requires that individuals and communities “constantly remake themselves in a manner that suits the fickle whims of capital with limited support from the state” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 263).

Drawing from the work of Donna Haraway, Muriel Cote and Andrea Nightingale point out that resilience as a contemporary concept cannot be “seen from nowhere” but must be seen as a concept “nested” within “political and social processes that give rise to the production and reproduction” of systems of power that operate “in and through” socioenvironmental systems (Haraway qtd. in Cote and Nightingale 2012, 481). To this end, they suggest an “engagement with social theories about structure/agency as a way to formulate questions that were previously invisible from a systems theory standpoint” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 481). This kind of “situated resilience approach” means that

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3 On the one hand, as Walker and Cooper note, “resilience” has become “a pervasive idiom of global governance”—a term flexible enough to be applied to the realm of “high finance, defence and urban infrastructure” (qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 254). On the other hand, MacKinnon and Derickson note that “resilience” is also often invoked by “progressive activists and movements,” including those critical of capitalism. It is due to the term’s more widespread use not only in the rhetoric of adaptive governance but also by activists themselves that they suggest there is a need for “critical appraisal” of the term itself as well as “the politics it animates” (2012, 254).
we must take context into account and ask, for instance, “Does the resilience of some livelihoods result in the vulnerability of others? Do specific social institutional processes that encourage social inequalities have implications for the resilience of these groups?” Or, “resilience for whom and at what cost to which others?” (Cote and Nightingale 2012, 485).

The rhetoric of resilience is often promoted by agents outside of local communities who are thought to have expert knowledge in spheres such as national security, financial management, emergency planning, public health, economic development, and urban planning, design, and policy making (Walker and Cooper 2011). These outside experts routinely impose “top-down” solutions that “place the onus on individuals, communities and places to become more resilient and adaptable to a range of external threats” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 254) while the cause of these threats themselves remain unquestioned, accepted, and even expected. This results in misplaced emphasis on the resilience of the “local” scale at the feet of individual citizens who have what Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell call “responsibility without power” (qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 255). Citizens at the local level are expected to mobilize their own assets and resources to solve problems that unfold primarily at the scale of global “capitalist social relations” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 253). This top-down process of “responsibilization” involves citizens and communities in their own risk management: it downloads responsibility to individuals by promoting “greater community self-reliance and empowerment,” often in the form of voluntarism or “community activism” while simultaneously shrinking the responsibilities, capacities, and powers of the state and treating capitalism in its current configuration as if it were a “given” or even “natural” external force (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Resilience strategies may make localities feel like they are empowered; however, by ignoring broader issues, such as the imposition of global market forces and the absence of social supports that are causing adversity and limiting opportunity in local communities in the first place, local resilience initiatives may inadvertently sustain and even perpetuate policies that perpetuate the problems to which localities are then forced to respond.

As MacKinnon and Derickson point out, “capitalism is itself highly resilient at a systemic level” through its constant “reinvention and restructuring” in the face of demise (2012, 261). The paradox, of course, is that the resilience of the capitalist system is premised upon the making-vulnerable of local and regional economies (and ecologies): “The long-term success of capitalism is predicated upon the periodic undermining of resilience of certain local and regional economies, which are vulnerable to capital flight and crisis in
the face of competition from other places offering more profitable investment opportunities” (Smith qtd. in MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 261).

MacKinnon and Derickson argue that the rhetoric of resilience in economic development discussions is the current iteration of the “creative class” and “creative cities” craze of the mid-2000s (Florida 2002; 2008; MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). They point out that, much like the creative class and creative cities narratives, resilience is a “mobilizing discourse” that presents individuals, organizations, and communities with the “imperative [to continually adapt] to the challenges of an increasingly turbulent environment” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). Walker et al. point out, however, that there is a major difference between “resilience” and “transformation” as advocated approaches to crisis (2004); however, it can sometimes be difficult to discern between initiatives that are adaptive behaviours that take a given system of power for granted and the initiatives that question the root causes of the distributions of power and attempt to agitate and activate against them. Unlike the creative cities narrative, however, which was criticized for advocating policy making that served the interests of the privileged creative class, resilience narratives appear to provide “more socially inclusive” scripts that require the engagement of all community members (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 260). Even then, there are a number of critical questions that individuals and communities must ask prior to pursuing apparently resilient policies and socially innovative solutions. These questions might include: Do these initiatives shift the diagram of power? Or does the diagram become even more entrenched through what looks like a state of flux? More specifically, if social resilience activities focus on solving problems at the local level, do corporations operating at a global scale continue to benefit by being able to reap profits while avoiding having to pay for problems? Do governments benefit by being able to continue to ignore the needs of people, having off-loaded this responsibility to individuals, neighbourhoods, and not-for-profit organizations? Does the “freedom” of the enterprising subject circumscribed by creating DIY solutions in discourses of social resilience take the place of what Hannah Arendt described as a “free” citizen engaged in political processes such as policy making or, conversely, in protest against problematic policies?

Indeed, the healthy sceptic of resilience discourses has good reason to answer these question by observing, for example, that all too often some parties “win” more than others; that those asked to share wealth and resources are all too often not those in position to accumulate wealth; and that those who move from ownership to usership models routinely become parts of an apparatus that concentrates ownership in the hands of a decreasing few while accelerating the
“mechanics of dispossession” for the majority (Tiessen 2012). The issue of ownership and control over what is shared is a key factor that is overlooked in discourses of agency in which people are asked to “take ownership” of problems that are, for better or for worse, not really in their control and to “take responsibility” in instances in which they have little if any power.

Foucault and Deleuze’s Neoliberal Diagrams: Producing Points of Resistance

The diagram is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field … a map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity … the cause of concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations take place “not above” but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 34, 37)

Foucault’s late work and Deleuze’s work on Foucault focus intensely on the situatedness of the subject in a neoliberal diagram of power and endeavour to identify possibilities for subjective modes of resistance. For Foucault, the notion of the self as an “enterprise” expresses a neoliberal configuration of subjectivity that is simultaneously an individualized and individualizing locus of power (McNay 2009). Deleuze’s “dividual,” too, is both created by and recreates a neoliberal diagram of power (1992). As Foucault and Deleuze identify, a diagram of power, although it may present routes of greater and lesser resistance, neither determines nor forecloses any particular pattern or flow of power. In addition, subjects situated within any diagram may engage in practices that present very little resistance and that thus reinforce power’s existing configuration. Deleuze situates subjectivity as a key site of the production of power when he underscores that the “dividual” works as a point through which power operates.

Deleuze, writing with Guattari, situates his discussion of subjectivity within his process ontology. For Deleuze, subjectivity is a process of becoming, and a subject is never a stable entity. Deleuze and Guattari write about becoming as “no longer time that exists between two instants” but rather “the event that is a meanwhile” (2009, 158). The subject—always a subject “in becoming”—is an entity that exists both as an “already happened” and a “still
to come” (2009, 158). The subject, throughout Deleuze’s work, is a materially mediated and modulated entity. Subjectivity is material because subjects are always material instantiations—composed of matter. Their becoming is also a material process in both its actuality and virtuality. Subjectivity is also mediated because the forces and flows of materiality are mediations. Just as subjects are processes, becomings, unfoldings, and meanwhiles, so too are all of the materialities of which they are composed. This composition is always a mediation of materialities. And finally, subjectivity is modulated because the mediation of materialities is always produced by and productive of power relations. The diagram of power that materializes, mediates, and modulates the way in which subjects are composed is a diagram that composes subjects as “meanwhiles”—both as “having already happened” and as “still to come,” both as subject to “power over” and as subjects with a “power to.” The key to resisting the ways in which subjectivity is modulated by “power over” is to draw a “critical cartography” (Braidotti 2005) of shifting diagrams of power and to indicate what Deleuze called the possible “points of resistance”—points through which “power to” can be exercised in ways that transform the diagram and de-“dividualize” subjectivity as it is currently configured.

For a shift in a given configuration of power to occur, the process of resistance cannot, however, simply be an oppositional resistance to the diagram of power. As many critics point out, binary oppositions are reductive representations of complex situations and, in capitulating to false binaries, resistances framed as oppositions often serve simply to reproduce existing diagrams of power. In a diagram of power premised upon Deleuze’s notion of “modulation” as a form of control, resistance must instead be thought in intensive rather than extensive modes, as transformation rather than opposition, and as drawing new cartographies rather than reproducing cartographies of power as they currently exist. As Deleuze describes, what is needed for transformation to occur is the ability to locate the points through which power is produced and reproduced so that the pressure of intensive resistance can be applied and configurations can be shifted. If subjectivity is the “point through which power operates,” then, as I argue here, neoliberal subjectivity is a pressure point—a key site that, if paid attention to, called into question, and placed under scrutiny, is also capable of being reimagined. If subjectivity is a “point through which power operates,” then it is a point through which diagrams of power can be reconfigured. Deleuze’s notion of subjective agency is not a “dividualized” and thus inert site of the reproduction of neoliberal diagrams of power but rather an empowered notion of agency in that it emphasizes rather than overlooks the material, mediated, and modulated connections between the subject to the system, and the individual to the
context. Affect, then, is a crucial component of activating and deactivating agency. However, affect must not be thought in individual terms but as material, mediating, and modulating relation between subject and system, individual and context, the local and the outside.

Deleuze describes the move from disciplinary to control societies as a shift from a more static to a more dynamic and flexible shape-shifting diagram of power. If the “enclosures” of disciplinary societies are “molds, distinct castings,” then the “controls” of control societies are “a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to another, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (Deleuze 1992, 4). The neoliberal apparatus (and the institutional systems that feed it) works, according to Deleuze, by dividing individuals from one another and within themselves by constantly presenting 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” (Deleuze 1992, 5).

Deleuze describes the deformations and undulations to which “dividuals” in contemporary capitalist societies submit and warns that so-called positive affect can be used to serve as a mechanism of control, which recalls van der Haak’s documentary:

Many young people strangely boast of being “motivated”; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It’s up to them to discover what they’re being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the telos of the disciplines. The coils of the serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill. (Deleuze 1992, 7)

Scholars such as Deleuze, and more recently Sara Ahmed (2010), Lauren Berlant (2011), and others, have also taken up the ways in which so-called positive affects such as “happiness” or “optimism” or, as Deleuze notes here, “motivation,” can seem liberating, but, under particular diagrams of power, such as those that emphasize enterprising notions of subjectivity, can in fact be oppressive. Affect, then, must be understood as part of the material condition, part of what is mediated, and modulated in the political economy of power. As these affect theorists underscore, the affective economy does not run alongside but is a critical part of the political economy, and the affective economy is managed using, in part, conceptual, rhetorical, and semantic modulations. It follows, then, that our critical understandings of contemporary capitalist political economy should be extended to include affective economies—the “promises of happiness” (Ahmed 2010), the “cruelties of optimism” (Berlant 2011), and the “boasting of being motivated” (Deleuze 1992, 7).
Using Deleuze’s conceptual schema, I suggest that social resilience, social innovation, and social sustainability are a set of social (and rhetorical) technologies produced by control societies for modulating political economies. Their rhetorics and their activities, their discourses and materialities, their actualities and virtualities are produced and are productive through a particular neoliberal diagram of power that “individualizes” the subject, and trades in an economy of affects and materialities and, indeed, affects as materialities. Deleuze’s comments on “technologies” or “techniques” of various modalities of power are instructive here. For Deleuze, technology is always “social before it is technical”:

And if the techniques—in the narrow sense of the word—are caught within the assemblages, this is because the assemblages themselves, with their techniques, are selected by the diagrams: for example, prison can have a marginal existence in sovereign societies (lettres de cachet) and exists as a mechanism only when a new diagram, the disciplinary diagram, makes it cross “the technical threshold.” (1992, 40)

These neoliberal diagrams of power function simultaneously as “always-already” displays of existing “relations between forces” and as the “still to come” or as “transmission[s] of particular points or features” (Deleuze 1992, 86). Existing diagrams of power thus produce the diagrams of power of tomorrow by transmitting features and prescribing what is possible. Notably, however, the diagram of power is not a fixed structure that merely reproduces its form but is rather a strategy that modulates possible reiteration “like a series of draws in a lottery, each one operating at random but under the extrinsic conditions laid down by the previous draw” (Deleuze 1992, 86).

The discourse of social resilience, social innovation, and social sustainability is thus more than mere rhetoric; it is also part of the production of practices that are always “material-discursive” assemblages (Barad 2007). These programs and initiatives and the rationale behind them belong to contemporary neoliberal governmentality that, under the pressure of international agenda setting organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, endeavour to bring about the kind of “rational economic” behaviour they desire by, as John Protevi argues in an interview with Manuel DeLanda and Torkild Thanem,

actively producing the social situations the model assumes: normalization of behaviour by making people behave in individual self-interest (due to lack of social interaction/social security). The problem comes when people write about such
economics as if they were only a matter of assumptions and models rather than prods for concerted efforts to produce a social reality conforming to the model’s assumptions. (DeLanda, Protevi, and Thanem 2005, 73)

The discourse of social resilience, social sustainability, and social innovation can then be said to function as an “abstract machine” that, as Deleuze and Guattari describe, links “a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field” (1987, 7). The diagrammatic or abstract machine, as they point out, “does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 142).

What possibilities do such pre-emptions and preclusions leave for subjectivity as a site of power? How can oppressive affective and political economies be transformed in a system of power designed to appropriate resistance, sustainability, and innovation in order to perpetuate, reproduce, and even pre-empt shifts in the status quo? How might we stay attuned to the ways in which tools of resistance might themselves become systemically absorbed and resistant to transformation?

The documentary *California Dreaming* ends by focusing on a housing commune created by a group of thirty-somethings, including architect Laura Burkhalter. Although Swiss-born, Burkhalter epitomizes the kind of forward-thinking subject position van der Haak ascribes to Americans, but she also articulates a number of important critiques—even if tensions exist between the two narratives she articulates. One of the key ways in which she differentiates the communal living project we see in the film from the communes of the 1970s is precisely by suggesting that the contemporary commune is “less ideological” and “more practical.” Burkhalter also observes that the housing crisis “helped us out” by making plain that you “can’t depend on the system,” a system that, for example, builds cities for “cars, money, and power” rather than for people. She remarks that the “system has made us [citizens] believe we’re powerless, but we’re not—the system only exists because we take part in it.” She adds that the financial crisis has prompted people to ask themselves how they can become empowered and self-sufficient. The solution, she argues, first involves “daring to imagine” how a “good city” would operate and, second, “taking some action.”

For Burkhalter and the friends living together in an urban commune, “taking some action” involves living together and growing and sharing their own food. She finds that in a post-financial crisis world, creating communities
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is more important for people across income levels and observes that they “need each other and depend on each other” and are “not as self-interested” now. When asked about whether the crisis represents a failure of the American Dream, Burkhalter replies that, although the “gold rush” may be over, the American Dream is bigger than that; the “American Dream has to do with freedom and self-expression,” which she argues has been caught up in materialistic self-expression and is currently being “redefined.” Perhaps “freedom,” she muses, is “freedom from the system” or maybe it’s “finding one’s own power.” She concludes by remarking that Americans are “very optimistic” and “very flexible”; they accept new identities and are experts at starting over and giving second chances.

Burkhalter’s critiques and proposals demonstrate the tensions inherent in the positioning of the subject in the neoliberal diagram of power. On the one hand, she makes the claim that the breakdown of the system demonstrates the ways in which individuals have been systematically disempowered through the unequal distribution of resources. However, she credits this breakdown for reminding individuals of the agency that they have, suggesting this agency exists “outside of the system.” At the same time, she argues that the current system only exists “because we take part in it.” Burkhalter’s response seems to be that the crisis prompts the creation of alternative communities, but it remains unclear whether or how these alternative communities, in her view, represent or ought to represent any challenge, connection, or transformative role vis-à-vis “the system” she describes. Since such communities are intended to exist precisely as alternatives to the system, this leaves the question of their relationship to the larger system unresolved. Critics of neoliberalism have problematized the idea that individual purchasing decisions are political gestures because they remain premised upon individualism, channelling the expression of “free choice” via market logics. Does moving from a consumption-oriented toward a production-oriented social model present a shift away from a “dividualized” lifestyle politics?

Further, Burkhalter asserts that the American Dream, which has to do with “freedom” and “self-expression,” was caught up in “materialism” and “self-interest” before the crisis and is only now being “redefined” as “finding one’s own power,” being “optimistic,” “flexible,” finding new identities, and starting over. Although she acknowledges aspects of her own relatively privileged position as a well-educated person with a strong social network, one of the unacknowledged ironies is that she was able to purchase the property for the commune in part because it had been foreclosed upon and was being sold at a post-crash price. It follows, then, that her own resilient, sustainable, and innovative activities are dependent upon another person’s poor fortune in a
system that perpetuates power no matter how much Burkhalter wishes to be “free.” Finally, Burkhalter does not acknowledge that the ability to make the social shift she advocates (from self-interest and materialism toward community living and self-empowerment) depends heavily upon class position and relative material privilege. As a contrast to the people profiled earlier in the documentary who have little to no access to basic goods such as a place to live and food to eat, Burkhalter is clearly in a more empowered position to begin with. Does it not follow that the contemporary, flexible, optimistic subject that Burkhalter enacts is a result of the current configuration of power, a mode of its reiteration, a mode of its own resistance to change?

The Struggle for Subjectivity in the Face of Dividualization

The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation and metamorphosis.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 29)

For Deleuze, the points through which power flows are the points through which power can be transformed. The configuration of subjects as “dividuals” is one such point in this diagram. Such a view of subjectivity—even in the context of the neoliberal diagram of power in which subjects are “dividuated”—means that subjects or “dividuals” are points qua material; subjects are products of mediated and modulated relations with the capacity not only to reproduce but also to fundamentally challenge contemporary rationalities “founded in the logic of the market and ‘enterprise culture’ and a dystopian vision of society” (Venn and Terranova 2009, 10). The non-oppositional, non-binaristic, but also non-resilient mode of intensive resistance is described by Venn and Terranova as the assertion of the possibility of new forms of sociality and ways of being constructed on the basis of a view of the human as essentially collaborative, convivial spiritual and historically located social being. This ontology is in solidarity with the view of life itself as grounded in the dynamic compossibility of all creatures. It follows that such a view is diametrically opposed to all ontologies founded on egocentric, self-interested, individualistic, atomized and abstract views of the human and of life generally. (10)
If, as Deleuze suggests, the “dividual” is a point through which power is co-produced and reproduced in the neoliberal diagram, what can this way of understanding power offer for a critical analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and systemic power? If power is produced both “from above” and “from below,” if the entire diagram is shot through with power, with subjects as a point through which power flows, then we must attend not only to community resilience as a “top-down” mandate of governmentality but also as a “bottom-up” activity of “community groups and environmental campaigns” (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 257). Further, we must be attuned to the ways both top-down and bottom-up approaches might be co-opted and reshaped such that they begin operating as two expressions of a single diagram of power.

In his essay “Postscript on Societies of Control,” Deleuze describes the transformative potentialities that inhere in any diagram of power, including the neoliberal diagram. He argues that the diagram, “as the fixed form of a set of relations between forces, never exhausts force, which can enter into other relations and compositions” (1992, 89–90). Every diagram—shot through with forces—“presents particular features of resistance, such as ‘points, knots, or focuses’” that “make change possible” (ibid.). In this article, I have explored subjectivity as one such “point, knot, or focus” in the neoliberal diagram, and the way in which so-called positive and negative affects modulate imagined and actualized subjective capacities.

Deleuze goes on, in the same passage, to focus not only on subjectivity as a “point, knot, or focus” through which a particular diagram of power is reproduced or transformed, made more resilient or resisted, but also on the role of thinking and action that exceeds the existing diagram. He writes:

*The diagram stems from the outside* but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to “draw” new ones. In this way the outside is always an opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun, but everything is transformed. In this sense … [the outside] presents itself as the possibility of “resistance”…. Moreover, the final word on power is that … power relations operate completely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in a direct relation with the outside from which the diagrams emerge. This means that a social field offers more resistance than strategies, and the thought of the outside is a thought of resistance. (1992, 89–90, emphasis added)

What emerges as a crucial criterion for activities that resist reproducing neoliberal diagrams of power is whether particular approaches to community
resilience, innovation, or sustainability interrogate, challenge, or otherwise act upon processes of power that lie outside of their immediate zone of potential. This outside can be thought of as having three critical dimensions. Distinguishing characteristics of resilient versus resistant or transformative initiatives is their ability to: (1) challenge “dividualized” subjectivity by connecting to a yet unknown or imperceptible “outside”; (2) question the outside’s relationship to broader power structures; and (3) connect local initiatives to other initiatives across spatial and temporal scales.

New Weapons

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…. There is not need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.

—Gilles Deleuze (1992, 4)

In this article, I have argued that the concepts of social resilience (as the capacity to resist change) and social innovation (as the capacity to change), though they seemingly occupy opposite poles of a “sustainability spectrum,” do not necessarily sustain anything other than prevailing systems of (neoliberal) power. This diagram of sustainability “dividualizes” and depoliticizes the subject by determining his/her agency in relation to structures and processes of power that demarcate the subject’s capacities and possibilities. Critics of contemporary narratives that are meant to address today’s social and environmental problems point out that while “adaptation” to the current situation is “clearly a necessary choice,” it is “only one of the numerous plausible options” (O’Brien 2012, 668). For critics like O’Brien, the idea of transformation is given too little attention within research and policy circles as a valid response to global environmental change. In one sense, this is not surprising since transformation often challenges the status quo, threatening those who benefit from current structures and systems (O’Brien 2012, 668).

4 As Paulo Freire (1970) pointed out in his work on education, the well-adapted human is one who does not problematize the changes that are being adapted to—a situation that conveniently suits the needs of the oppressors: “the more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of their right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe” (Freire 1970, 76 qtd. in O’Brien 2012, 669).
O’Brien argues that research that focuses on adaptation fails to engage with “the real ‘adaptive challenge’ of climate change.” In her view, adaptation research fails to question “the assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, loyalties and interests that have created the structures, systems and behaviours that contribute to anthropogenic climate change, social vulnerability and other environmental problems in the first place” (ibid.).

One promising transformative approach is MacKinnon and Derickson’s suggestion that we adopt a politics of resourcefulness as an alternative to resilience (2012). Resourcefulness is meant “to problematize both the uneven distribution of material resources and the associated inability of disadvantages groups and communities to access the levers of social change” (2012, 263). Indeed, if resilience, as Cote and Nightingale argue, shifts the focus “away from the quantitative ability of resources” and towards the scope of response options (2012, 478), then resourcefulness might be a strategic example of a form of resistance that can transform the ways in which structures of power are being materialized, mediated, and modulated. Developed with collaborators in the Govan Together project, resourcefulness as a strategy is characterized by incorporating an understanding of the “outside” that today’s popular narratives of resilience, sustainability, and innovation often take for granted and leave unchallenged. In response to the problem of resilience-oriented solutions—namely, that individuals and communities adapt to change from the bottom up while the top-down external structures of power maintain their dominance—MacKinnon and Derickson emphasize that resourcefulness begins with the “normative desirability of democratic self-determination as its fundamental starting point” (2012, 264). MacKinnon and Derickson argue that the concept of resourcefulness is both “more scale-specific” in attending to the need for capacity building in communities and more “outward-looking” by focusing on the importance of “foster[ing] and maintain[ing] relational links across space” (2012, 264). Resourcefulness is thus “spatially grounded in identifiable local spaces” but also “open and relational” in that it “recogniz[es] the wider politics of justice that often underpin local activism” and “emphasizes the need for alliances between community groups and broader social movements” (ibid.). A politics of resourcefulness challenges the conservativism of resilience-based policies by focusing instead on fostering the “tools and capacities” for communities to find the “the discursive space and material time that sustained efforts at civic engagement and activism, as well as more radical campaigns, require” (2012, 265). MacKinnon and Derickson suggest that community groups can, in this way, form a part of “an expansive spatial politics” and connect to “broader campaigns and social movements that seek to challenge
neoliberal policy frameworks at the national and supranational scales” (2012, 266).

Researchers like MacKinnon and Derickson note that the “the burgeoning sphere of action” established by contemporary narratives of “social resilience” and “social innovation” tends to operate according to a kind of “inclusive localism that is largely apolitical and pragmatic in character” (2012, 258). In the face of the apolitical characteristics of these status quo sustaining social movements it seems to me that different, more globally minded (even if locally rooted) and more politically engaged (even if pragmatic and practical) tactics are necessary. Communities wishing to develop transformative strategies with which to challenge neoliberal configurations of power and their reproduction through “dividualized” modes of subjectivity and control could begin the journey out of the diagram by: (1) interrogating their complicity with the ubiquitous diagram of power of which they are an expression, a diagram of power that more often than not grows stronger by being confronted directly (rather than by being sidestepped obliquely); (2) re-imaging the human subject as being connected to and dependent on, rather than “dividualized” from, others; and (3) extending their vision for change beyond not only the local and the present, but also beyond the “human” and beyond the “social,” by pursuing new epistemological and ontological trajectories adequate not only to the problems of today but to the challenges of future generations.
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MONETARY MEDIATIONS AND THE OVERCODING OF POTENTIAL:
NIETZSCHE, DELEUZE & GUATTARI AND HOW THE
AFFECTIVE DIAGRAMMATICS OF DEBT HAVE GONE
GLOBAL

MATTHEW TIESSEN

To breed an animal with the prerogative to promise—is that not precisely the paradoxical task [and] the real problem of humankind?

—Nietzsche (2007, p. 35)

Forgetfulness is … an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word…. To shut the doors and windows of consciousness for a while; … a little peace, a little tabula rasa of consciousness to make room for something new…. That, as I said, is the benefit of active forgetfulness…. We can immediately see how there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, immediacy, without forgetfulness. The person in whom this apparatus of suppression is damaged, so that it stops working, can be compared (and not just compared—) to a dyspeptic; he cannot “cope” with anything.

—Nietzsche (2007, p. 36)

Since the global financial crisis began in late 2007/early 2008, corporately owned financial news outlets have bombarded us with stories about promises—financial promises. Promises kept and, quite often, promises broken. Promises by, for instance, European Central Bank president Mario Draghi that the

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Eurozone’s monetary union will never fail; promises by Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke that his central bank will buy unlimited amounts of United States’ bonds and “mortgage-backed securities”; promises by Greece that its creditors will be made whole; and promises by the European Union that the recent theft from depositors’ accounts in Cyprus is a one-off event. The keeping or breaking of these promises has, in turn, given rise globally to emotionally inflected affective responses from publics and technocrats alike: fear, guilt, trust, hope, and anger. These affective investments, in turn, are modulated by those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, in perpetuating (or extending) financially derived power, and in imposing a debt-based diagram of power onto increasingly indebted nations and populations. Whether we’re being bombarded by the mainstream press with stories about Greek bailouts, bond-holder haircuts, public austerity measures, the breaching of national debt limits, ballooning banker profits, levitating stock markets, or rising unemployment numbers, the emphasis is always—whether implicitly or explicitly—on the relationship between promises, broken promises, the need to fulfil obligations and responsibilities, and the affective effects of doing or not doing so.

This affectively saturated emphasis on feelings and promises in contemporary financial discourse objectifies the degree to which the world of finance and economics is an emotional one, held together by interconnected and interdependent feelings of responsibility, commitment, trust, faith, belief, and hope. These financially inflected feelings run the gamut, with everything from palpable joys to debilitating horrors yielding embodied responses: sinking feelings, lumps in throats, hairs standing on end, weights on shoulders, cold chills, stomachs churning, skin crawling, and even suicidal nihilism (Kermeliotis, 2012). These feelings of joy and fear, in turn, orbit around that most centrally significant site of (financial) promising—the relationship between creditors and their debtors and the promises, commitments, and restrictions these relationships impose (and, in turn, the ways these relationships are enforced). These days, of course, this relationship doesn’t just play out between individuals. Ours is not merely a world wherein emerging sentiment analysis protocols and predictive algorithms are being designed and implemented to “manipulate [individual] consumer behaviour” (Andrejevic, 2011, p. 604) at a micro level (i.e., from one purchase to the next); rather, with the Dow Jones industrial average at an all time high, we are currently living through an era in which the centrally governed macroeconomic system itself has been put to work in service a global coterie of undemocratic institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements) in order to pre-emptively modulate public—or indeed, global—
affect through the manipulation of, for instance, international interest rates (Levick, 2013), according to the whims of a banking/corporatist/political assemblage bent on perpetuating the illusion that all is alright and that growth springs eternal in their diagram of debt. The modulatory tools at their disposal include: (1) the ability to modulate global interest rates, the “value” of money, and the price of debt; (2) access to high frequency trading platforms capable of pre-emptively shaping financial markets (Tiessen, 2012); (3) a globalized media network beholden to wire services (Reuters, AP) or authoritative but anonymous authors (Economist, 2013) that endlessly repeat status quo bolstering news reports bent on highlighting the nominal gains of global financial markets while downplaying, or ridiculing, progressive or disruptive anti-austerity, anti-corporatist, anti-Eurozone movements or events (Economist, 2013); and finally (4) government puppets ready to enact quasi-legal frameworks for stealing from citizens—as was recently seen in Cyprus—thus revealing the degree to which government is, and has been for some time, the administrative arm of international finance.

With this financialized landscape as a background, in this paper I focus on the affective dimension of debt and its primary mode of dissemination—privately and digitally created credit money. To do so, I examine the age-old—though increasingly visible—relationship between debtor and creditor, a relationship that today is (re)distributing social, cultural, and political relations by (re)distributing power along a financially inflected debtor/creditor continuum. (As I write this piece the bank accounts of citizen “savers” in Cyprus are being looted to the tune of 40% to 60% in order to pay Cyprus’ creditors and bond holders their pound of flesh.)

Affective Bonds

As it has been for millennia, so it is today that the debtor/creditor relationship is determined by its being sealed—foreclosed—by a central promise, an affectively charged commitment and obligation that effectively gives it its power and that prevents the obligation—the debt or promise to repay—that constitutes the creditor/debtor bond from being forgotten or easily annulled (Graeber, 2011). In other words, the affectively inflected nature of today’s monetarily determined relationships—whether at the individual or national level—is not new. The central promise that produces the obligations—the debt—and that primes the affectively charged pump is the following: the debt (the obligation) must—and will—be repaid and will not, if the creditor gets his or her way, be forgotten or absolved. In other words, the debtor is guilty until being proven innocent (Lazzarato, 2012).
The promise made by debtor to creditor is—in a world held hostage by too-big-to-fail banks—becoming increasingly central, objectifying the degree that today’s world is being split between those in position to dispense credit and those who are required to service debt. Moreover, those individuals and institutions closer to the money-spinning centre have access to far lower interest rates and far greater lines of credit than those on money’s peripheries. We can regard this differentially distributed access to credit as effectively reflecting “monetary Jim Crow laws” (Keiser & Herbert, 2009) that assume their legitimacy based upon the pre-emptively perceived risk and guiltiness of those being discriminated. Indeed, over the last few years, the world has witnessed something of a banking-oligarchy-takeover of the West with countries like Greece, Ireland, Iceland, and now Cyprus being fiscally and socially decimated by an income-stream-seeking financial elite that believes democracy can be overruled by yield-seeking creditors and that installing unelected “technocrats” (like Trilateral Commission alumni Lucas Papademos in Greece or Goldman Sachs graduate Mario Monti in Italy) with the moral rectitude to restore fiscal “discipline” by fleecing the public is par for the course. Indeed, the apparent moral high-ground of the creditors—who appeal to the affective sensibilities of the public by claiming they only want to help indentured servants fulfil their own promises—are so beyond reproach that no one bothers to mention or recognize that the bailout of, for example, Greece is neither about the bailout of the Greek people, nor is it simply the bailout of Greece’s creditors (though this is closer to the truth); rather, the “bailout” of Greece—or the bailout of the EU, not to mention the United States, through “unlimited” quantitative easing (Weisenthal, 2012)—is in fact the bailout (albeit a temporary one) of the entire Eurozone (and beyond) by the Greek population who are being forced, in the process, to sell off their assets (including their not insignificant gold reserves and islands), accept “austerity,” and edit their constitution in a banker-friendly manner. In other words, today’s centres are being bailed out by their peripheries, or, when looked at another way, the strength of today’s financial centres are only as strong as their weakest—and most peripheral—links (Tiessen, 2013).

Today, then, the imperceptible demands inherent to credit-money—demands that are facilitated by the affective modulation and mediation of money’s subjects—are being made visible and laid bare. In our debt-stricken economies, we are blatantly being confronted with the requirements of money’s nonhuman agency: that our societies, environments, and human and nonhuman relations become unceasingly financialized and that all activities and investments be directed toward economic growth so that money’s debt-driven appetite can be satiated by coercing global populations to become interest-
generating—rather than wealth-creating—machines. In such a world, money affects us by necessitating that we financialize our lives, and we affect money by, more often than not, capitulating or succumbing to its demands. Indeed, if we take the long view—decades long—the global circulation of credit-money can be regarded as a consumer consuming technology whose inevitable effects are seen today by the way financial indebtedness is in the process of bringing corporations, “sovereign” states, and individuals to their knees (facilitated by the media’s appeal to our affective sensibilities by depicting debtors as slothful, lazy, and untrustworthy).

With algorithmically driven trading, high-speed computer networks, and “dark pools” of untraceable capital, the credit-money diagram since the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the end of the last vestiges of the gold standard in 1971 has been leveraged and expanded to such an extent that today’s debt market (in the form of financial derivatives, for instance) is many times larger than the economy of the entire globe, capable of consuming earthly existence in a single, highly leveraged, gulp. In light of these developments, I now highlight some of the ways that credit-money’s ability to affectively infect the social field narrows and pre-emptively determines our collective zones of potential, in turn overdetermining the ways that we can affect and be affected by leveraging debt’s demands in order to impose a Nietzschean sort of “bad conscience” across the increasingly, and, it seems, unceasingly, financialized world.

The Promises of Monetary Modulation

For Nietzsche, not being able to forget promises or commitments, or, conversely, being forced to remember them, is dangerous since the act of forgetting itself can be leveraged—both by ourselves and by others—as a tool for constructing what more recently has been described as “societies of control” (Deleuze, 1992). For Nietzsche, not being able to forget a promise, or dissolve a commitment or debt, implies a desire—imposed on us either by ourselves or, in this case, by our “creditors”—to cling to the past, to refuse to “let go,” to be beholden to prior circumstances, and to “keep on desiring what has been, on some occasion, desired” (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 36). The potency and prioritization of the unforgettable promise was recently articulated and reaffirmed by French President Sarkozy who said of Greece, “our Greek friends must live up to their commitments” (Kulish, 2012); similarly, Germany’s Angela Merkel notes, if Greek commitments are not met, “it will not be possible to pay out the next tranche” (Peel, 2012) of the bailout money (i.e., it will not be possible for Greece to be saddled with yet another mountain, or
“tranche,” of debt) (Christie, 2011). Additionally, the need for the Greeks to keep their (financial) promises is laid on thick by the two unelected heads of the European Union—European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President Jose Barroso—who, in a joint email, declared, “We fully trust that Greece will honour the commitments undertaken in relation to the Euro area and the international community” (Chaffin & Peel, 2011).

I focus, then, on the nature of this promise that (financial) debt must—and will—be repaid and will not be forgotten. It is a promise that is today more than ever defining and determining the economic, and affective, diagrams that define our everyday lives. It is a promise that saturates our societies with cascading commitments that, when they fail, yield carefully managed crises. In particular, I am interested in the way this promise and its affectively charged and mathematically defined demands are being put to use by those in, and in pursuit of, power, influence, and control, by those in the know who collude to extend just a little too much credit as one component of a broader mechanics of dispossession whereby war over resources and wealth is today fought using financial instruments and “innovations” rather than conventional weapons. After all, let’s not forget that the destabilizing end result of overextending credit is well known by the creditors (and is all too soon forgotten by the debtors) (Minsky, 2008). But rather than focusing too much on the specifics of the ways financializing forces are gaining increasing leverage over ever-more subjugated publics, I want to focus on the ways that debt, in the form of credit- or bank-money, has been able, as it has evolved and sought paths of least resistance, to infect, and affect, the social body through an all but invisible backdoor, that is, not simply through the transparently obvious asymmetrical relationship of creditor to debtor but through the apparently innocuous or neutral nature and evolution of the monetary medium itself. In other words, while the drama inherent to the relationship of debtors and creditors takes centre stage, the relationship of money, specifically “credit-money,” to the depersonalized consumptive processes of financialization that have precipitated the indebtedness of global citizens and nations, goes largely unnoticed and underacknowledged. That being said, the depersonalized agent-like capacities of credit-money have not been wholly invisible. Indeed, Marx, in the third volume of Capital, observes that as interest-bearing capital (credit-) money gains a sort of nonhuman urgency (if not agency) all its own, it appears magically “as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest, of its own increase” (1981, p. 516). As Marx saw it, credit-money as autopoietic flow of credit and debt parasitically preys on human desire, guilt, and greed as it gets put to use by those who control it. He explains:
In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish is elaborated into its pure form, self-valourizing value, money breeding money, and in this form it no longer bears any marks of its origin. The social relation is consummated in the relationship of a thing, money, to itself. Instead of the actual transformation of money into capital, we have here only the form of this devoid of content. As in the case of labour-power, here the use-value of money is that of creating value, a greater value than is contained in itself. Money as such is already potentially self-valourizing value, and it is as such that it is lent, this being the form of sale for this particular commodity. Thus it becomes as completely the property of money to create value, to yield interest, as it is the property of a pear tree to bear pears. And it is as this interest-bearing thing that the money-lender sells his money. (Marx, 1981, p. 516; my italics)

My aim, then, following Marx’s attempts to describe money as a sort of nonhuman biological agent, is to focus not merely on the affectively charged nature of the creditor/debtor relationship, but to consider more closely the nonhuman agency or desire of credit-money itself. My suggestion—and I am by no means alone (see, for example, Hudson, 2012)—is that contemporary credit-money needs to be understood as a sophisticated technology of dispossession and that today’s money-machine, which necessitates and gives rise to the infrastructure that supports it, affects the social landscape by pre-conditioning it, by opaqueely overcoding the relationship between debtor and creditor on a grand scale (but also imperceptibly), until finally (as in Greece) debt saturation, through the extension of credit, precipitates a credit crisis at which time all is revealed: that the creditor holds all the cards, that the debtor holds none, and no matter how much desire the debtor has to repay the exponentially compounding debts, the debtor’s future is, and will be forever, foreclosed by the promise to repay. Moreover, when the promise goes unfulfilled, punishment begins in earnest, including the annexation of the debtor’s hard assets, dignity, and future. Credit-money, then, can be understood as a debt-based and time-dependent trap—one that seduces in the beginning and that snaps shut in the end (although lending, extending, and pretending can prolong the illusion that all is well until, of course, the rolling over of credit reaches a point of saturation and becomes more an exercise of “praying and delaying”).

At any rate, calling in their debts is what creditors value the most. In Nietzsche’s view, the pleasure taken by the creditors inflicting affective (and in our case, financial) pain upon debtors is a manifestation of the masochistic joy
those in power take when preying on the weak. Nietzsche sets the scene for us of the joy taken by creditors in position to make the debtors struggle desperately to pay unpayable debts as follows:

The debtor, … in order to … guarantee … the … sanctity of his promise, and in order to etch the duty and obligation of repayment into his conscience, [can pawn] something to the creditor … in case he does not pay, something that he still “possesses” and controls, for example, his body, … or his freedom, or his life (or, in certain religious circumstances, even his after-life, the salvation of his soul, finally, even his peace in the grave…). But in particular, the creditor could inflict all kinds of dishonour and torture on the body of the debtor…. Let’s be quite clear about the logic of this whole matter of compensation: it is strange enough. The equivalence is provided by the fact that instead of an advantage directly making up for the wrong (so, instead of compensation in money, land or possessions of any kind), a sort of pleasure is given to the creditor as repayment and compensation—the pleasure of having the right to exercise power over the powerless without a thought, … the enjoyment of violating: an enjoyment that is prized all the higher, the lower and baser the position of the creditor in the social scale…. Through punishment of the debtor, the creditor takes part in the rights of the masters: at last he, too, shares the elevated feeling of being in a position to despise and maltreat someone as an “inferior.” … So, then, compensation is made up of a warrant for and entitlement to cruelty. (Nietzsche, 2007, p. 41)

Nietzsche observes that the exuberant retribution imposed by the creditor upon the debtor is not motivated merely by the need for that which is owing to be repaid, but because the debtor’s inability to pay is, in fact, an instance of aggression, an attempt to harm the creditor, to shame him, to cheat him, to destroy him, to deny him what is rightfully his. Here affect does not motivate repayment, as it does for the debtor, but rather initiates and energizes a desire for revenge and cruelty. The debtor can be framed by the creditor as not just guilty of not paying, but as being guilty of assaulting the creditor—of causing the creditor “harm” given that the unpaying debtor causes the creditor to forfeit his/her identity as creditor. The debtor’s punishment, therefore, must fit the severity of the crime. As Nietzsche explains, the debtor
not only fails to repay the benefits and advances granted to him, but also actually assaults the creditor. The anger of the injured creditor ... makes him return to the savage and outlawed state from which he was sheltered hitherto: he is cast out—and now any kind of hostile act can be perpetrated on [the debtor]. “Punishment” at this level of civilization is simply a copy ... of normal behaviour towards a hated, disarmed enemy who has been defeated, and who has not only forfeited all rights and safeguards, but all mercy as well. (Nietzsche, 2007, pp. 46–47)

At the same time, however, Nietzsche reminds us that under certain conditions indebtedness needn’t be so bad. Indeed, in Nietzsche’s view the debtor can, on rare occasions, dodge the dangers of default if he or she is lucky enough to have a creditor so powerful, so magnanimously generous, as to annul the debt, to refuse repayment, to absolve the debtor. As Nietzsche observes, “The ‘creditor’ always becomes more humane as his wealth increases; finally, the amount of his wealth determines how much injury he can sustain without suffering from it”; indeed, he observes, “It is not impossible to imagine [a creditor] so conscious of its power that it could allow itself the noblest luxury available to it, that of letting its malefactors go unpunished. ‘What do I care about my parasites,’ it could say, ‘let them live and flourish: I am strong enough for all that!’” (14). Such acts of generosity today, while not impossible, are often coercively implied when, for example, the Greek bondholders begrudgingly accept one billion Euros in “haircuts.” The unspoken truth, however, is that by annulling one debt, the bondholders clear the table for the imposition of another since the public secret that goes unmentioned is that these days the creditors themselves are the ones without collateral. But by picking upon the weakest links in the chain (Cyprus, for example) the debt-based diagram’s illusion of implacable power remains intact. Indeed, today’s apparently generous examples of “debt forgiveness” are best regarded with suspicion since all too often they are simply unconventional strategies for extending and expanding power, control, and the status quo by other means.

But let’s focus a bit more on that inflection point where the debtor/creditor relationship is revealed to be one where all the risk lies with the debtor, that point where debt “bailouts” are revealed to be nothing more than the imposition of more debts (loans), or that point where forgiving debt surreptitiously clears the way for more debt. For it is at this point that the debtor comes to the realization that what has in fact been imposed—unpayable debt—is not an unfortunate mistake, but was the objective all along. This debt-drive is especially apparent when applied to nation states that rarely, under normal circumstances, create their own currencies, but must go cap-in-hand to the bond
market to seek the fiscal sustenance they need (with interest owing) when taxes just aren’t enough to pay the bills (which seems to be most of the time).

Deleuze and Guattari observed that the ability to burden the entire social field (what they call “the socius”) with unpayable obligations, and for the multiplicities that compose the socius to desire unwittingly their own slavery in the belief that it will set them free, is most effectively achieved by using the technology of “credit-money.” They understood that this monetary technology—one that brings more debt into existence than money (since over 95% of today’s money comes into existence in the form of loans)—both limited and determined the socius’ diagram of desire. Deleuze and Guattari understood that the very impossibility created by credit-money’s machinations—that the debt it generated each time it is brought into being could never be repaid—bestowed upon those with their hands on the monetary “printing press” the all-powerful ability to impose what Deleuze and Guattari called an “infinite debt” on the entire social sphere:

The infinite creditor and infinite credit have replaced the blocks of mobile and finite debts. There is always a monotheism on the horizon of despotism: the debt becomes a debt of existence, a debt of the existence of the subjects themselves. A time will come when the creditor has not yet lent while the debtor never quits repaying, for repaying is a duty but lending is an option. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 197)

Again, the real actor here that we must not lose sight of is the nonhuman one deemed by the majority of debt-serfs to be neutral—the monetary medium of exchange itself. Indeed, debtors are more likely to critically evaluate themselves, their culpability, or their relationship to their creditors, than to evaluate (let alone come to understand) the nature of the medium conditioning their condition, inscribing them with its demands, modulating their bank accounts and credit ratings (Deleuze, 1992). So when Deleuze and Guattari ask, “How can people possibly reach the point of shouting: ‘More taxes! Less bread!’”; or “why do people still tolerate being humiliated and enslaved, to such a point, indeed, that they actually want humiliation and slavery not only for others but for themselves?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 29) my response is that the answer they give to these questions is only partly accurate. In their view, following Wilhelm Reich, we must reject the idea that “ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses [is] an explanation of fascism” in order to accept that “the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted
for” (p. 29). My sense, however, is that in addition to a desire to be led, the masses could also be said to have a desire to remain ignorant (Roberts & Armitage, 2008)—to remain blissfully oblivious to the mechanisms and assemblages of power preying upon them; for if ignorance is indeed blissful, then it is perhaps preferable to taking even the first step on the road to monetary understanding, which, in its simplest form, is grounded on at least three paradoxes or cognitively dissonant claims: 1) the claim that a financial system based on growth can persist on a finite planet; 2) the fact that there is never enough money in existence to pay all the debt; and 3) that if in fact all debts were repaid, there wouldn’t be any money left.

Money’s Promise

So, money—what are we to make of it? For one thing, what passes for money today across the financial landscape has the following two inherent problems or characteristics.

First, as already mentioned, the vast majority of money today is privately created credit-money and comes into existence in the form of a loan. That is, whenever individuals or nations “borrow” money, new money is, in fact, brought into existence ex nihilo; this, of course, is inflationary over time (depending how much money—i.e., credit and debt—is being created) and leads, in turn, to a situation where productive energies must perpetually be put to work paying down—that is, extinguishing—debt by attempting to make profits keep pace with debt’s inherent capacity for exponentially compounding expansion (Keen, 2011). Ours is a debt-driven economy in perpetual “need of monetization”; nominal monetary amounts must be made or forced to expand (even if it means central bank money printing through, for example, Zero Interest Rate Policies, quantitative easing, etc.) (Nesvetailova, 2007, 2008, 2010). Put more crudely, the debt-based money form we use can be understood as a mechanism that has been deliberately or perhaps fortuitously designed to hold individuals and nations hostage, forcing them to capitulate to its interest-owing demands. Insofar as this is the case, we might say that the demands of money precede the political and social “solutions” that are designed to satiate and solve them. Austerity measures or neoliberal policies, for example, are not so much political or ideological choices but apparently “necessary” monetary solutions (solutions that render the source of the problem imperceptible) (Seigworth & Tiessen, 2012). Deleuze and Guattari understood the determining role the debt-money form takes in capitalist economies. They observed that the apparently “objective movement of capital” shows that
the productive essence of capitalism can itself function only in this necessarily monetary or commodity form that controls it, and whose flows and relations between flows contain the secret of the investment of desire. It is at the level of flows, the monetary flows included, and not at the level of ideology, that the integration of desire is achieved. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 239)

A second inherent problem (at least for debtors) with the systemic and global use of digitally created credit-money today is that money, since Nixon removed the United States, and, in turn, the global economy, from the last incarnation of a gold standard in 1971, has become untethered from all material constraints and now finds itself seeking to express instead the infinitely expansive capacities of human desire (insofar as it can be endlessly borrowed into existence). Previously, the major currencies (and hence credit) were tied to a positive value: the value of a well-defined quantity of a good of well-defined quality (i.e., gold). In 1971, this tie was famously, and unilaterally, cut. Ever since, money has been tied not to positive but to negative values—the value of debt instruments (Grossberg, 2010). In other words, nowadays money comes into existence ex nihilo as a debt with interest owing and can be leveraged effectively infinitely, or at least until the interest owing on the debt becomes unstable and unsustainable (Minsky, 2008). This deterritorialized flow of capital is described by Deleuze and Guattari as a “flow of infinite debt,”

an instantaneous creative flow that the banks create spontaneously as a debt owing to themselves, a creation ex nihilo that, instead of transferring a pre-existing currency as means of payment, hollows out at one extreme of the full body a negative money (a debt entered as a liability of the banks), and projects at the other extreme a positive money (a credit granted the productive economy by the banks). (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 237)

This bank-money or credit-money derives its value, of course, from the faith-based investments and desires of every one of us—from our belief in the value and promise of computer digits and pieces of bank-created paper and from our fear of initiating or even exploring alternatives (although these days citizens’ fear of their own depreciating currencies are leading them in increasing numbers to virtual crypto-currencies like Bitcoin, which is surging in both value, relative to other currencies, and demand [Salyer, 2013]). Indeed, in today’s debt-saturated world, a world in which hard asset values are routinely at risk of deflating, money, unhinged from restraints, floats along on a sea of
central-bank-injected liquidity held in check only by the relative value of other floating currencies and kept stable by the primary tool of central bank fiscal discipline: fluctuating—though currently rock-bottom—interest rates. This credit-money of ours, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, modulates the complete conditions of our collectively financialized realities since as a completely fiat-based and faith-based system it has been “decoded,” deterritorialized, unhinged, and gone into orbit. They write:

The decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius thus constitutes the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism…. This tendency is being carried further and further, to the point that capitalism with all its flows may dispatch itself straight to the moon: we really haven’t seen anything yet! (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 34)

But having been freed of its relationship to the limits and restraints of the physical world (e.g., by no longer being restrained by its relationship to gold or anything else) the decoded flows of liberated capital must expand (parasitically) across the geosphere and biosphere in search of endless new decodings to code, claim, control, and territorialize. Indeed, today’s deterritorialized money must code and overcode if is going to have any meaning at all. As Deleuze and Guattari say, “How much flexibility there is in the axiomatic of capitalism, always ready to widen its own limits so as to add a new axiom to a previously saturated system!” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 238). The capitalist machine, as Deleuze and Guattari explain, is unlike previous social machines insofar as it is incapable of providing [its own] code that [makes sense or corresponds] to the whole of the social field. [But] by substituting money for the very notion of a code, [capitalism] has created an axiomatic of abstract quantities that [can attach themselves to any coded or decoded flow] as it keeps moving further and further in the direction of the deterritorialization of the socius. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 245)

**Conclusion**

In closing I want to suggest that the history of money’s evolution can be understood as reflecting money’s nonhuman agency and desire insofar as it mirrors money’s appetite to deterritorialize itself in an effort to more efficiently expand through the reterritorialization—the overcoding—of flows of desire, flows of energy, flows of material, etc. Deleuze and Guattari listed the recent
trajectories of money’s decoding of itself—using, we could say, people for its own purposes—when they explained in the early 1970s that “the route taken by [money’s] decoded flows is traced by recent monetary history: the role of the dollar, short-term migrating capital, the floating of currencies, the new means of financing and credit, the special drawing rights, and the new form of crises and speculations” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 245). More recently, of course, we can add new forms of financial “innovations,” decodings, and recodings, such as: 1) collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), which served both to decode and recode mortgage securities prior to the implosion of the housing market; 2) algorithmically driven high frequency strategies, which aim to exceed the limits placed on finance by space and time by sending computer generated financial trading signals across the globe at near lightspeed and which today make up over 70% of stock market volume in the United States; and 3) the expansion of the financial derivatives market, which today is worth by some estimates $1.29 quadrillion, or $1.29 thousand trillion (Baba et al., 2008). To put this debt- and leverage-derived number into perspective, we need only compare it to the total GDP of the entire planet: $45 trillion (Matai, 2010). In other words, the world of debt and financial betting has been reported to be twenty-nine times as large as the total economic output of the globe, credit and risk having become completely (and finally) decoupled from their relationship to underlying—or even planetary—assets.

Deleuze and Guattari could not have been more prescient when they wrote, “In a word, money—the circulation of money—is the means for rendering the debt infinite” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 197). Their analysis of money as the machine that pre-emptively motivates the multiplicitous manifestations of capital mirrors and builds on that of Marx whose analysis of credit- or bank-money in the third volume of Capital imagines it as a sort of biological entity with a nonhuman agency all its own. The promise, then, that forms the bond between creditor and debtor is not as simple as it at first appears. Indeed, as we continue to theorize money’s relationship to economic and social (and environmental) relations, it behoves us to develop critical responses that recognize that the relationship between a creditor and a debtor is not a relationship among two parties—or between two agencies—but between three. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the third party in the relationship is a nonhuman agent—credit-money—whose mechanistic and exponentially expanding desires for (debt) bondage leverage the tripartite relationship in favour of the creditor at, quite literally, the expense of the debtor. Credit-money, as Marx and Deleuze and Guattari understood, has never been a neutral means of exchange or store of value, but is rather a complex tool of power that, although created out of nothing each time credit gets extended, always brings
with it a debt—an obligation—that exceeds the amount of the “loan” and that expands exponentially over time if left alone. Credit-money’s invisible excess, then, overcodes the relationship between creditor and debtor, compounding its asymmetries, and pre-emptively determining who will be guilty and who will be entitled to extract collateral and repayment by any means necessary.
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INFO NYMPHOS

ERIKA BIDDLE

You don’t make love anymore because it’s dangerous, because sometimes there are problems—one person may not be very skilled or the situation may get messy. So you use a kind of machine, a machine that transfers physical and sexual contact by waves…. What is at play is no longer the connector rod in its housing, but the loss of what is most intimate in our experience of the body…. In cybersex, one sees, touches, and smells. The only thing one can’t do is taste the saliva or semen of the other. It’s a super-condom.

—Paul Virilio (1995a)

Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges, whose writings celebrate the sensual hyperreality of the world, famously struggled with deteriorating vision. He was such a voracious reader that he read himself blind. Fittingly then, Borges once wrote, “everything touches everything.” Developments in network culture bear this out (see Terranova 2004). New communications technologies enable the constant mobility of bodies and information; networks of people, ideas and interests continuously oscillate and grow in changing social landscapes that provide opportunities for digital frottage via always-on interactivity; interactive

1 As Terranova (2004, p. 1) explains it, “To think of something like a ‘network culture’ at all, to dare to give one name to the heterogeneous assemblage that is contemporary global culture, is to try to think simultaneously the singular and the multiple, the common and the unique” about the hyperconnectivity and informational overabundance characteristic of contemporary network societies.
fields of experience become immersive lifeworlds. In these relational and fluctuating fields of affinity, mental and libidinal energies engage on an informational plane, provoking erotic contact between bodies and machines to produce new forms of social control and subjectivization.

Theorists such as Michel Foucault, Paul Virilio, Gilles Deleuze, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Tiqqun have discussed the development of a socialization of control that is coextensive with the “information society.” In his “Postscript on Control Societies” (1995), Deleuze extends Foucault’s periodization of regimes of power in Discipline and Punish from the disciplinary power of modernity (biopolitics) onward to what he calls “control societies” (dividuation). For Deleuze, control societies mark a shift in dispositif wherein “power relations come to be expressed through the action at a distance of one mind on another” (Lazzarato, 2006, p. 186).

Deleuze attributes this movement to the rapid development of communications and informational technologies during the cybernetic turn of the post-World War II era and the mechanisms and techniques of control they enable. Lazzarato extends this analysis of power and technology in control societies from the physical body to subjectivity—or the body’s “psychic life.” As Tiqqun (2001, p. 33) suggests, the post-World War II development of cybernetic capitalism has steadily involved a generalization of self-control, or, “a disposition that favors the proliferation of devices, and ensures any effective relay.” What this statement effectively expresses is capital’s efforts to dominate by its imperative to connect, to stay in the grip of control.

This article will investigate the transformation of subjectivities and new forms of social control through this imperative as it manifests in technological advances in communicative media and human-computer interaction (HCI). Considering a selection of contemporary social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and online porn, it will examine modes of performativity and participation on the Internet as forms of haptic control. While haptics are traditionally thought to directly involve touch (“haptic” is Greek for “touch” or “grasp”), it may be more broadly understood as forms of non-verbal...

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2 From Foucault to Deleuze, the control diagram mutates from territorialization to deterriorialization, from segmentation to perpetuation, from enclosures to open distributed networks, from the external division of masses of bodies as a control mechanism (individuation) to the internal division of bodies into measurable and adjustable parameters as a control mechanism (dividuation). Bogard (2007) provides a definition for dividuation that’s among the clearest I’ve read: dividuation is “the internal division of entities into measurable and adjustable parameters, in the way, for instance, a digital sound sample is divided into separate parameters of tone, pitch, or velocity.”
communication and somatic feedback.

As William Bogard (2007) explains, haptic control is “not just the control of touch but rather a technical and social program for the adjustment of sensibility as a whole, including proprioceptive awareness, the body’s internal sense of its own position and movement relative to the outside world.” The immersivity of haptic forms is thus co-evolving with the Internet’s capacity to control at a distance. With the hyperconnectivity these communications technologies enable, capitalism’s modes of desire and anxiety are inscribed in bodies as processes wherein devices and their users have become increasingly adaptive to each other. We are learning to experience the body as a medium, rewiring our brains for new affects and learning from how machines learn.

**Haptic Control at a Distance: From Pleasure to Performativity**

The human body is the magazine of inventions, the patent-office, where are the models from which every hint was taken. All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of its limbs and senses.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1885)

In 1958, at the height of the Cold War, the United States Department of Defense created the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). In 1969, ARPA hooked up the first two nodes of what would become the ARPANET—an experimental computer network—and a new universe was born. After a decade of development, in 1983, the TCP/IP protocol, which is still the standard used today, was launched. In 1988, the US Federal Networking Council approved the use of the Internet for commerce. It was nineteen at the time, still a teenager by all accounts. In 1992, commercial entities offered Internet access to the general public for the first time in the form of the World Wide Web. Our subjectivities—with or without Internet access—have been networked ever since.

As a correlate to this, in Deleuze’s notion of digital control societies, power is increasingly networked into every aspect of social life and

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3 Regarded by many as a “McLuhanism” because of the subtitle to his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, this is Ralph Waldo Emerson writing on the emerging symbiosis between man and machines that was part of his larger project on solitude.
“technology is social before it is technical” (1986, p. 40). Broadband has allowed for the creation of programs that constantly reach out to the Internet for updates in order to forestall death by pre-programmed obsolescence. Many basic applications cannot function without communicating over a network. The necessity of being on the Internet and connected to a server has been built into these utilities. The social feedback mechanisms that the Internet provides parallel the manner in which the programs we use are controlled at a distance. Proponents call this networking of techno-social spaces “ambient intimacy” (Reichelt, 2009) and claim that it enables people to keep in touch with a level of regularity and closeness that real time and distance conspire to make impossible.

However, with every promise for connection comes an interface. On the one hand, there is journalist Clive Thompson’s (2007) argument that social media permit a tactile sense of community. He refers to this as “social proprioception.” If proprioception is the unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself, then social proprioception is an augmented capacity to sense the presence of those in your community while at the same time informing, or reinforcing, where you are in dynamic techno-social space. Almost two decades ago, Virilio (1995b) discussed this phenomenon in terms of “tactile perspective”: the ability to reach at a distance, to feel at a distance, amounting to the shifting of perspective toward a domain the audiovisual perspective of old had yet to encompass. He called this “tele-contact.” What Virilio describes is an early form of haptic control at a distance. Developments in haptic control have been marked by a series of shifts toward control from afar, toward the immaterial exertion of power.

And yet the connectivity and intimacy that is promised by these new platforms forever retreats before the grasp of its users, in a manner that recalls Roland Barthes’s discussion of the striptease in Mythologies, a collection of critical articles on French mass culture in the 1950s. Barthes observes that one of the primary experiences of capitalism is its “look but don’t touch!” proviso for the things we most desire. At the core of capitalism’s aesthetic, then, is the seduction and refusal of the body. The striptease illustrates this performative phenomenon as it pertains to the lap dance, where the spectacle of erotic contact doubles as haptic control. Lap dance patrons know their desires will be unfulfilled, but this refusal is idealized, reworked in fantasy and becomes essential to the pleasure of the experience. Thus, the author states, “consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking” (1999, p. 79).
As will be discussed in detail, contemporary social media users occupy the same position as the lap dance patron, only their experience is redoubled by the physical presence of the screen and the feedback mechanisms of interactivity. Captured by their focused attention, watching themselves perform a role in a virtual interchange, the possibility for connection is instrumentalized and recoded as instantly attainable self-pleasure. The new forms of social control operate at a distance by activating their subjects’ desires to participate and perform. These desires are inherently erotic—as Marshall McLuhan (1967) wrote, “When information is brushed against information … the results are startling and effective. The perennial quest for involvement, fill-in, takes many forms” (pp. 76–78)—and are heightened by the striptease of online performativity.

In his dialogue on love, Plato wrote that human Eros took many forms. Many years later, Sigmund Freud laid the foundations for a neuroscientific understanding of sexual and romantic plasticity. Arguing that a person’s ability to love intimately and sexually unfolds in stages, beginning from infancy through adulthood, he wrote, “The sexual instincts are noticeable to us for their plasticity, their capacity for altering their aims” (Freud qtd. in Doidge, 2007, p. 98). More recently, neuroscientific theories on subjectivity—in particular, neuroplasticity—have helped define new perspectives on social relations. Neuroplastic theory has underlined the importance of polysemic forces (e.g., intensity, attention, movement, sensation) in affecting change in the brain. Neurological connections can be wired and rewired through habitual stimulation of the brain, “neurons that fire together, wire together” (Doidge, 2007, p. 109).

What is at stake in control at a distance and in haptic control is a remapping of neural networks. As Norman Doidge informs his readers, focused attention is the condition for massive plastic change (p. 111). The users of these platforms are practising wiring new images and behaviours “into the pleasure centers of the brain, with the rapt attention necessary for plastic change” (p. 109). With every social ping, the brain is rewired for new pleasures and new forms of control.
Haptic Technologies: From the Vibrator to Teledildonics

Hey, don’t knock masturbation; it’s sex with someone I love.

—W. Allen & M. Brickman (1977)

From the beginning, haptic technologies have been closely linked to the administration of pleasure. The relationship between pleasure and performativity in haptic control and the movement from direct touch to control at a distance is illustrated by the history of the vibrator. The electromechanical vibrator was created in 1887 at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, an institution famous for its experimental treatments of hystero-neurasthenic disorders in women, or “hysteria,” which comes from the Greek word for uterus. In Plato’s Timaeus, the cause of the “ailment” was allegedly an errant uterus moving through a woman’s body, to her chest, where it smothered her. In the first century CE, physicians and midwives used manual stimulation to treat hysteria. In the second century CE, the physician Galen diagnosed its cause as the sexual frustration of particularly libidinous women when they are deprived of an outlet for their sexuality. Later, in the Victorian era, it was taken as a sign of the stresses of modern life on the fragile constitution of “pedestal women,” as Victorians liked to imagine the female of the species. Thus, when it crossed the ocean to America, physicians asserted it was a sign that America was finally catching up to the modernity of Europe (see Briggs 2000).

According to Rachel Maines’s (1999) history of the vibrator, technology and the orgasm have been linked since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, when the vibrator was first used by physicians as a “capital-labor substitution innovation” to treat female hysteria. Treating hysteria through pelvic massage had become a lucrative practice for physicians because of the tendency toward repeat business. However, after their initial excitement, male doctors began to search for alternatives as they became tired of the labour involved in manually stimulating women, often for more than an hour at a time. These doctors were reluctant to lose the practice to midwives, so to maintain their incomes and at the same time retain control of the female orgasm and body they turned to the vibrator. One of the earliest of these machines, invented in 1870, was a clockwork-driven vibrator. More devices soon followed and eventually became available for use in the home. By 1918, the Sears catalogue included a home vibrator with attachments, proclaiming it to be “very useful

4 These experiments most famously occurred with French neurologist Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot.
and satisfactory for home service” (Maines, 1999, p. 42). It was one of the earliest widely available electrical home appliances.

The release of the vibrator into consumer society falls in line with the historic shift that Foucault outlines in *Discipline and Punish* from the eighteenth century (when physical torture was the most widely used control device) to the modern era, beginning after the French Revolution and expanding into the early parts of the twentieth century. Foucault writes: “At the beginning of the nineteenth century the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared…. The age of sobriety in punishment had begun” (1995, p. 14). The administration of bodies became an issue of self-governance and creating discipline, which required living outside of one’s self in order to be self-policing. Putting women on the drawing board, as it were, in a social experiment as to how the body is controlled without the threat of violence proved to be a remunerative venture because the subjects tended toward habituation. The “treatment” of female hysteria served to sustain a patriarchal and proprietary control of women, but also, paradoxically, to fulfill capitalism’s task of putting bodies to work. The vibrator is an almost perfect precursor to social networking, as an example of how we can, as Foucault (1983, p. xii) explains, “desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.”

While the exertion of haptic control through technologies of pleasure is at least as old as the vibrator, in today’s network society, haptic control is marked by a series of shifts toward control at a distance through the feedback loop of online performativity that augments the horizontal quality of capitalism’s aesthetics of pleasure that Barthes recognized in the striptease. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in an online video for fuckingmachines.com involving porn crossover star Sasha Grey, the pseudonym for Marina Ann Hantzis. Hantzis was born in 1988, the same year the teenaged Internet was placed in the hands of corporations. In 2006, upon turning eighteen—and becoming legal tender under US statutes—she began her career in porn as “Sasha Grey” and very quickly became an Internet sensation. Her video for fuckingmachines.com was made within nine months of her entering the porn industry.

The setting of the video looks like a military research laboratory in Hollywood movies, where clandestine experiments take place. As far as the viewer can see on-camera, the room is cold, grey, modern, and bare except for a light table (approximately six-feet long) and the machine. Grey sits on the table

5 See Gadamer’s work on hermeneutics, relating to Foucault (through Barthes).

6 Sasha Grey starred in Steven Soderbergh’s film *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009) and had a supporting role in Season 7 of HBO’s *Entourage* (2010).
as if waiting for a medical examination alongside her imminent partner, a dildo attached to a chrome shaft driven by a metal wheel. The demonstration begins, and the dildo moves in and out of Grey’s body like a piston as the wheel turns. The contraption is reminiscent of an IKEA plexiglass box display in which an armchair is repeatedly tested by having a piston-powered shaft drive up and down against it to show that the chair can hold up to service in the field. While the video is supposedly an opportunity for Grey to test the pleasuring capacity of the golem fucking machines, one gets an unmistakable sense that she is being tested, the tolerances of her body and mind, as if she were an android sex companion off the assembly line that must have its kinks worked out before being shipped to the consumer. Indeed, she looks like a clone of any one of a number of waifish Hollywood starlets.

In the video, the machine starts slowly, and we hear Grey moan and scream profanities as she is repeatedly penetrated, with the camera between her legs and the light box illuminating the prosthetic penis and her genitalia. But then the wheel starts to spin faster and faster, she is penetrated more aggressively, and it becomes impossible to tell whether she is displaying simulated pleasure, or if she is experiencing real pleasure or pain. The machine revs up to a speed where it would be impossible for her to get off and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish whether she is being raped by the machine or, more chillingly, whether that is the point and it’s a calculated spectacle produced for an online audience alone in their rooms but for the glow of their laptop screens.

The body of Sasha Grey, being raped or pleasured by the machine for an online interactive audience, connects the past and present of haptic control. An interactive technology created for military purposes and turned over to corporations for mass propagation culminates in the broadcast behaviour of a teenager, who has invented another self on the Internet—a porn avatar with a fake name from which she can disassociate—being manipulated by a machine created by physicians to preserve their profits and control of the female orgasm by treating female hysteria.

Finally, there is the interactive audience, enjoying the pleasuring/rape of Sasha Grey by a machine that must feed their own sense of inadequacy, and participating by offering commentary on an act to which they will always remain spectators. The comments themselves are performances for which they receive feedback: attention or indifference. For these viewers then, the pleasure of porn is no longer enough; they require the seeking of recognition from other pornographic viewers. In the throes of self-pleasure, haptic control is exerted at a distance. Ultimately, the scene provides both an illustration and metaphor for
the Internet: a device for the consumption and the annihilation of the body, where participation is little more than the ability to offer comments on a pre-set narrative and freedom is self-subjugation.

The Medium is the Massage: Connectivity in 140 Characters or Less

Sex is not speaking anymore. It is rather babbling, and faltering, and it is also suffering for it. Too few words, too little time to talk. Too little time to feel.

—F. Berardi (2007, p. 200)

In 1985, Friedhelm Hillebrand, chairman of the non-voice services committee within the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), developed research towards the goal that by 1986 all cellular carriers and mobile phones would support the short messaging service (SMS) for its subscribers (see Millan 2009). This service occupied a smaller data channel, initially used to alert a mobile device about reception strength and to supply it with bits of information regarding incoming calls. It was a system by the cell phone for the cell phone, an internal feedback loop to inform mobile devices of their connectivity to other devices in the network.

In a quest for cheap implementation, the capacity of this channel was tweaked to accommodate short alphanumerical messages for subscribers. Research for the character length included analyzing postcard texts and Telex messages and Hillebrand sitting at his typewriter, counting the number of letters, numbers, punctuation marks, and spaces on the page as he typed out random sentences and questions. Nearly all of his messages weighed in at approximately 160 characters, thereby setting the standard service providers still use today.

In 2006, Twitter, a microblog service where one can post messages via the Web, instant messaging (IM), or SMS, was born from this research. Twitter permits only 140 characters, which is evidence towards the economy of language we’ve been tasked with ever since the advent of print culture. Since Twitter went viral in 2008, the question “Why do we Twitter?” (Thomas 2009) has been at the forefront of discussion. According to a panel of “experts” assembled by the London Times in 2009, “We Twitter to reassure ourselves that we are alive” (see Pemberton 2009).
In the most banal sense, this is true. A Twitter emergency broadcast system has been in development since 2008. In May 2008, before news of the 7.9-magnitude earthquake in central China hit major news sources (CNN, MSNBC, the BBC, even the United States Geological Survey), local Twitter users had broadcast the information from their smartphones. More recently, the Iranian, Tunisian, and Egyptian governments notoriously blocked access to Twitter in an effort to curb protests, domestic solidarity efforts, and broadcasting of the unfolding Arab Spring to the international community. Proving faithful to its origins, Twitter can serve as an electronic message in a bottle.

But this isn’t the way the majority of people use Twitter, nor does it account for its ever-growing popularity. Twitter puts myriad possibilities for self-expression and self-promotion into the palm of one’s hand. Twitter’s capacity for immediacy, mediation, and remediation serves as a tool for control at the most deterritorialized level, or as M. Beatriz Fazi (2009) writes, “communicational practices of mass expressivity on the one hand, or, abstract corporeal decay and immaterial representation on the other.”

Aldous Huxley warned in *Brave New World* (1932) that new technologies would be called into existence by the social chaos resulting from rapid technological progress in general and the atomic revolution in particular, and develop, under the auspices of efficiency and stability, into the welfare-tyranny of Utopia. Technology would be created and humans would be adapted to a media world that does not really exist outside of its expressions.

In another classic work of dystopian science fiction, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there’s a discussion about “Newspeak,” a state-ordained language simplified to the point where any independent or contrary thought is impossible “because there will be no words in which to express it” (1983, p. 49). With the kind of communication that’s been adapted for SMS, a new universal language is produced. This text-byte self-expression is rarely more complex than the level of detail provided by the Japanese smart toilets that analyze human waste and send the results to your cellphone (thereby making it easier to Twitter the information). The messages are short, repetitive, and they render all authorship and communication generic. Communication, which “transmits to us a universe made up of disconnected images and incoherent remarks,” has become, as Alain Badiou (2006) among others have said, in the

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7 I’m adapting Fazi’s argument here. Although she is not explicitly referring to Twitter, she is describing forms of phatic suppression that can easily be applied to the platform.

mass communication of our most personal discourses, increasingly standardized, commercialized, coded, oriented, and channelled by the infinite glitter of merchandise. In the velocity of this form of communication, people need narratives that are quickly accessible. Hollywood has produced a narrative library that is “ready-to-hand,” to use Martin Heidegger’s phrase, which provides the means to reduce lives into badly written screenplays one text-byte at a time. The minutiae of tweets or status updates may vary but the basics are the same.

In Jean Baudrillard’s version of the simulacrum, the copies are identical without an original. Twitter provides tools to turn its users not into exact copies, but indistinguishable variations without an original. Social networking utilities have the capacity to render their users mongers of two-dimensional selves. Mimicking celebrity culture in the way the paparazzi cover every mundane aspect of celebrities’ lives thereby glorifying every social ping, social media users are able to be their own paparazzi, squeezing out fifteen minutes of fame by making themselves visible by dint of bandwidth consumption and, like well-behaved smart toilets, documenting and mass disseminating the most mundane and intimate acts of their daily lives.

**Phantom Co-Presence: Doing What It Takes to Amass Friends and Followers**

The amplification and modification of identity is at the core of social media’s seductive appeal and capacity to exert control. Identity is the first thing one creates logging on to any computer service. Users must define themselves in some way—whether it is through a screen name, a personal profile, an icon, or Gravatar—and at the same time, an audience, space, and territory are also defined. The disguises used as online identities reflect a society geared towards image manipulation and self re-creation.

What social networking technologies claim to augment is the ability to connect with others and form communities. However, connection and community have become matters of velocity and statistics. Twitter, for example, allows its users to constantly broadcast and update private accounts of their internal lives as if they were the minutiae of a world-historical event in order to attract followers. Facebook provides more of an “application mashup” than Twitter’s comparatively limited functionality and became omnipresent in the same year the latter was invented. As Thompson (2008) writes, “By 2006, Facebook had become the de facto public commons.”
Franco (“Bifo”) Berardi (2010) suggests that Facebook makes friendship impossible. Like Twitter, its users are fast-wired to assess visibility and emotional self-worth through the accumulation of followers. The Twitter or Facebook user is, from this perspective, what Fazi (2009) has described as a “strange creature in between a behaviourist Golem, pushing buttons and waiting for feedback, and a transcendental ego of Kantian reminiscence, positing itself and its relation to technology as a world-creating operation of knowledge.” As Fazi suggests, the promise of self-expression and interconnection does not go much further than the limits of solipsism.

The giddiness of participation distracts from how even the most transgressive interfaces bear the mark of an authority that keeps on changing but is an always-present phantom in the “network society” (Castells 1996), an assemblage comprised entirely of social networks that provide means for people to communicate without personal contact. Baudrillard (1998, p. 146) described this as “the ecstasy of communication,” where we are all wired into “connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication.” These connections are distractions from the drama of alienation. This is how the Internet captures its users, but instead of offering the end of spectacle through perfect communication, it does the bait and switch, and we receive something other than what we paid for—the spectacle of communication.

Virilio (2005) has said the evolution of the virtual involves the development of a full-fledged aesthetics of play. According to him, play is not something that brings pleasure; on the contrary, it expresses a shift in reality, an unaccustomed mobility with respect to reality, and we are in danger of getting hooked on virtuality. Virilio argues that we’re not only slaves to an addiction with technology but we’re on our way to becoming the “planet man”: a being who is totally self-sufficient with the help of technology, who doesn’t need a partner because he has cyber sex, doesn’t need intimacy because he’s socially networked, and doesn’t have to go anywhere because the information highway starts and ends in his home. All his social responsibility filters through the Net in an infinite feedback loop, communicating and receiving all he needs to sustain himself. This being even has his own gravity in the “cosmic solitude” of the “interstellar void” that Virilio pictures as the future commons (see 1995b).

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9 Fazi, writing from an art historical perspective, is trying to understand the lineage (from the early twentieth century avant-garde to Web 2.0) and phenomenon of abstract expressivity—from technique to technics.

10 Virilio’s vision brings to mind science fiction’s dystopian futures, such as Harlan Ellison’s short story “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” and Arthur C. Clarke’s 2001: A Space
Virtuality permits and develops a taste for transgression, but the transgressive acts of our false identities leave traces—most notably, guilt. Users can commit antisocial taboo acts in some sort of hazy in-between grey area where there is no apparent responsibility but at the same time feel the twisting of their souls, as they cannot shake the norms their real-world selves live with on a daily basis. Guilt, however, makes people compliant. In The Trial (1925), Franz Kafka’s protagonist Josef K. wakes in the morning to find two men who ask him to go with them. Their only power over him is his sense of guilt, having performed some transgression he cannot identify, and because of this he follows them.

So from the Internet dream we wake, the Fausts that we are, and find ourselves guilty; we find ourselves willing to be led. Guilt, then, is yet another way that control is exerted at a distance. Considering that all forms of cybersex occur in the ultra-mediated environment of our digital devices, whether on or offline, is it possible that the Internet biomaps a society of guilt? The perverse pleasure of being subjects to power by participating in its growth fulfills a post-historical yearning for virtual participation. It is a fantasy that can easily be turned into a nightmare, but, like any fantasy, it first appears as a benign place to play out one’s dreams. In these self-authored dramas one can be agent and victim, but there is a Faustian bargain: to experience everything, the good and the bad, be evil, be the victim of evil, but all of it virtually, with a thin sheet of latex between self and world.

Conclusion: Mass Hyperconnectivity and the Seduction and Refusal of the Self

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: “Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.” The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances.

—Guy Debord (1994, p. 15)

 Odyssey. These are visions of how power plays itself out beyond politics, how the subjugation of the self as a purely virtual phenomenon can easily be exploited, and how the most dangerous machines are the smart and sensitive types.
With the proliferation of online social networking tools and the plastic spaces they provide, the Internet is the new social factory, a computational meta-architecture that frames everyday communications, penetrates every aspect of social relations, monitors and controls the movement of bodies, desires, and capital. Far from a celebration of our individuality, social media platforms represent an inherent distrust of it.

In a perverse twist on Foucault’s idea of the panopticon, where the prisoners are in the yard and the jailers are watching over them, with social networking programs we’re both the prisoners in the yard and the jailers watching over ourselves. As Thompson (2008) puts it, “young people today are already developing an attitude toward their privacy that is simultaneously vigilant and laissez-faire. They curate their online personas as carefully as possible, knowing that everyone is watching—but they have also learned to shrug and accept the limits of what they can control.” The mythic agency of social status via connectivity needs to be vigilantly maintained and reasserted, but as Berardi (2009, pp. 162–163) warns, “devices of social control are replaced by automatisms…. The living collectivity has no decisional role any more.” Every connection made is a spectacle of performativity. Every byte that’s measured by some external authority is exceeded by the way we stalk ourselves online.

New haptic technologies build on older forms of discipline characterized by surveillance, adding the promise of pleasure to the threat of capture and punishment. Time on the Net is built upon the promise of the erasure of the past. Consumption of the Internet’s highly mediated forms of sociability has long been premised on the belief that our behaviours are consequence free, that in the virtual worlds we inhabit, everything can be erased. Erasure is the mark of capitalism, and consumerism is the habit of destruction and replacement. There can be no permanent satisfaction of desire, only the creation of dissatisfaction following a temporary high. The carrot the Internet offers is the pleasure of participation, the fantasy-generating element, the false intimacy, the developing egocentrism of it—on Twitter, everyone is a star—and the stick is terror and bodily fear (of exposure to AIDS, diseases, germs, violence), the fear of social interaction and alienation endemic to rampant materialism, and the fear of our own mortality, which is ramped up to fever pitch by the practice of consumption. The act of consumption is the running away from a threat that we always carry with us and are reminded of by the very technique of escape—our own annihilation.
The horizontal quality of capitalism’s aesthetics of pleasure that Barthes recognized in the striptease is simultaneously amplified, multiplied, internalized, and made public in the social reproduction of haptic controls. The body, the “magazine of inventions” (Emerson 1885), becomes technological medium in order to implement, habitually even, network society’s haptic controls. Italian author Roberto Bazlen (1973) writes, “True life means to invent new places where we can be ruined … every new work is the invention of a new death.” The Internet, invented under the wings of the US military-industrial complex and now serving as the world’s largest social reproduction factory, may very well be that new place for ruin.
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ANEW INDIVIDUATION: 
DELEUZE’S SIMONDON CONNECTION

ANDREW ILIADIS

The notion of form must be replaced by that of information, which implies the existence of a system in metastable equilibrium that can individuate; information, the difference in shape, is never a single term, but the meaning that arises from a disparation.

—Gilbert Simondon, L’individuation psychique et collective (2007, p. 28, my translation)

I. Introduction to Simondon

When the prominent French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) agreed to write a rare book review in 1966, no one could have expected the powerful endorsement that the notoriously scrupulous reviewer would give to the author within the very first paragraph: He displayed “intellectual power with a profoundly original theory of individuation implying a whole philosophy” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 86). Deleuze went on to extol the significance of the work and its author, a young philosopher from Saint-Étienne. His name was Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989). Unable to break through to an English audience in his lifetime, Simondon is only now being translated into English and finally getting recognized as an original thinker of information, communication, and technology. And it’s about time. Simondon’s influence has touched thinkers in many philosophical traditions, and now, over twenty years since his death, he is once again challenging our beliefs and helping us reconsider how we engage with fundamental issues relating to materialism, identity, and technology.

What a strange thing to say, that an obscure French theorist from the 1950s somehow influenced our discourse on culture and technology in such a large way as to have unarguably changed the way we philosophize information today, but that is exactly what is happening. In what follows, I will briefly
introduce Simondon, before showing how his notion of individuation allows for a unique reading of materiality. To do so, I focus on Aristotle’s classical notion of the concept of hylomorphism before turning to the requalification that Deleuze introduces (by way of Simondon). Simondon is one of the lesser known French theorists to have recently emerged from (or rather, remained buried in) what was as the so-called structuralist, and then, regrettable, poststructuralist scene in post-World War II Europe. However, today we can almost claim him a clairvoyant. The “informational turn” in philosophy and cultural theory over the last twenty years—as well as the appearance of that ubiquitous descriptor of our age as an “information society” more generally—have prompted a few astute observers to renewed whisperings of Simondon’s name. Semi-youthful representatives of our new techno-informational world, such as Tiziana Terranova, Eugene Thacker, and Bernard Stiegler have kindled English interest in this once almost-forgotten philosopher of technology. The philosophers of science—Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, Andrew Feenberg—are on to him too. The fact remains, however, that Simondon never really left us. His vast repertoire of concepts—the theory of individuation, concrétisation, preindividual, virtuality, functional dissymmetry, and so on (there are many more)—which some of this article will help to explain, has remained with us and quite popularly so throughout many of the philosophical ups and downs of the past half century. The theories have remained but not, it would seem, uttered from Simondon’s mouth or scribbled from under his pen. For better or worse, a large part of the Simondonian corpus has survived, in part refashioned, under the tutelage and reimagining of another much better known and in some ways more prodigious philosopher. It can be said that a large part of Deleuze’s oeuvre was dedicated to actualizing the very same implied philosophy he mentioned in the early review.

Simondon is explicitly mentioned only twice (excluding the odd footnote) in what are, in my opinion, Deleuze’s two most important and influential texts—*Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*—and only a handful of times in his entire body of work. Just two mentions of the man who regularly uses and came up with (in addition to the previous list) concepts for the following words, which should by now be quite familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in the Deleuzean brand of philosophy: affect, complex system, disparation, virtual, actual, sensation, assemblage, singularity; the list goes on. Of course, many other philosophers have used these terms before Deleuze, just not quite in the same idiosyncratic fashion. Readers of Deleuze would be forgiven for not knowing that he was not the first philosopher to utter these words. But this should be no matter; philosophers borrow and reinterpret vocabulary from other philosophers all the time. What makes this case
interesting in particular is that Deleuze was quite fond of dedicating the subject matter of articles, chapters, and in some cases entire books to other philosophers, his friends and enemies included. Why then no dedicated piece on the one philosopher who we can say without question influenced him at least as much as Spinoza, Bergson, or Nietzsche, to all of whom he dedicated a comprehensive monograph? Why have we been forced to wait until now for Simondon’s arrival?

There are two reasons that might explain Deleuze’s light touch when it comes to his Simondon references, and another two that might explain the absence of any mention of Simondon in the general milieu of the English reception of post-World War II French thought. First—though it may strike some of us now as ridiculous—Simondon may have been too “fresh.” We are in the habit today of dedicating books, conferences, and founding entire journals to thinkers who are not even finished their publishing careers, let alone dead (e.g., Slavoj Žižek), but at the time Deleuze may have thought that writing a larger piece on Simondon may have been somewhat infelicitous. Alberto Toscano cites the French style of offhanded referencing as a different possible explanation (Toscano, 2009, p. 380). Another reason is that, and this is far more unlikely, Simondon was “too close” to Deleuze’s own project. Simondon may have been his “secret weapon,” as it were. Foucault once said the same of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Yet another explanation, this time proffered by Brian Massumi (1956–) in a lengthy interview on Simondon, sees the 1980s’ and 1990s’ general methodological preference for social constructivism in lieu of other, truly rigorous post-humanities as the culprit (Massumi, 2009, p. 37).

While many of these theories make sense, and in reality the answer could be an amalgam of them all, the more likely reason that we are now finally seeing Simondon’s work appear in English is due to his tumultuous publishing history in his home country. After studying at the École Normale Supérieure and the Sorbonne, under Georges Canguilhem (1904–1995) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) (the influence of both thinkers can be felt throughout Simondon’s body of work), Simondon defended his doctorat d’État dissertations in 1958. The French system at the time required that students complete two papers, one long, one short. His primary thesis was L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information (Individuation in the Light of the Notions of Form and Information), published in two parts under two different titles. The first was published in 1964 under the title L’individu et sa génèse physico-biologique (Individuation and its Physical-Biological Genesis) at the Presses Universitaires de France (and again in 1995 by Editions Jérôme Millon). The second part, however, published under the title L’individuation psychique et collective (Psychic and Collective Individuation),

In any event, Simondon deserves to be treated as an important philosopher not only in reference to Deleuze but in his own right. Although it is not the task of the present paper, a systematized account of Simondon’s philosophy is needed given the concepts and terminology that he has handed down to us (albeit up to this point mostly through his interlocutors). Simondon’s was a quiet career compared to those of his French contemporaries. He did not have the same global reach as Michel Foucault (1926–1984) or the prolific and diverse writing career of Deleuze. The latter two philosophers are read in many of the main disciplines, including those at the “fringe,” and they have been translated into multiple languages. Simondon’s works, on the other hand, are only now being translated into English (translations of the larger pieces seem to be permanently in progress), and he is predominantly read in philosophy. A few journals in recent years have published special issues on his work (*Parrhesia* 7, 2009; *Pli* Special volume, 2012; and most recently, *SubStance* 3, 2012), and there has been an international conference. Things are slowly beginning to change. There are two books, long available in French, that have only recently been translated and are now available in English. They are Muriel Combes’s *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* and Pascal Chabot’s *The Philosophy of Simondon*. Both of those texts, however, approach Simondon from idiosyncratic perspectives (Combes from a political and ethical one and Chabot from an introductory perspective). Toscano is the closest to analyzing Simondon in the context of the history of philosophy in his *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. Here, I would like to zero in on some important observations made by Toscano in that text, particularly relating to Simondon’s sustained engagement with a critique of hylomorphism and his ties to information theory, all while reading him alongside Deleuze.

At stake for Simondon and Deleuze is a critique of the Aristotelian notion of hylomorphism. To that end, in this essay I mention Deleuze’s indebtedness to Simondon only to allude to Simondon’s early ingenuity, and to evoke whatever familiarity with the concepts that might exist for anyone who has already encountered Deleuze. In part, my desire is to provide a coherent account of what could be argued as Simondon’s two most pronounced concepts—the concepts of individuation and *disparation*—and to rescue them from the annals of the continental echo chamber, to modernize them enough for
the non-specialist. Lesser known than the thinker is his notoriously difficult and prosaic style. I would like to clean it up enough so that today’s information and communication students might understand what was at stake for Simondon as early as the 1940s. What they will find, I hope, are three things. The first is that the Simondonian model of individuation stands in a long line of theories known traditionally as the principle of individuation—though they sometimes go by different names—in the history of philosophy, and that Simondon’s contribution was really a new type of philosophy of information that found similarities with but remained opposed to the mathematical theory of communication. The second is that it made our understanding of information more dynamic and in so doing also our understanding of ourselves as individuals—“dividuals,” Deleuze would say—and the world around us from an epistemic-ontological point of view. In some important ways, Simondon’s conception of information as ontologically significant can be seen as a solution to the mind-body and subject-object problems. Finally, and I leave this as a kind of final thought, it may offer us a political perspective from which to engage the neoliberal world around us. Society has changed since the Cold War era in which Simondon wrote, and the late capitalist stage of neoliberalism has ushered in technologies and ways of socializing—ways of knowing—that are remarkably different. The individuation model should help us to formally identify and categorize—or at the very least recognize—some of these differences.

I will begin by looking at how the concept of individuation is different in the thinking of Aristotle. The reason for this is to trace something of the genesis of the principle of individuation, to see how Simondon arrived at the concept and to place it in relief against its older formulation. While variations on Aristotle’s notion have been made throughout the history of philosophy, particularly in the work of Scotus, Leibniz, and Nietzsche, Aristotle’s notion retains for our purposes enough to indicate the clean break that Deleuze and Simondon make with the old notion. Additionally, Aristotle is a good choice since Simondon often uses language taken from him while not necessarily adopting his positions. I will not attempt a comprehensive account here (readers are encouraged to see Toscano’s aforementioned Theatre of Production) but instead provide some cursory background to the history of the concept of individuation. For instance, Aristotle sees something like the principle at the center of the problem of metaphysical causality alongside the notion of the substratum (a type of underlying, formless materiality). Potentiality and actuality are his main concerns. To this claim is countered another definition, this time given to us by Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1930–1992); the principle of individuation is the main act at work in the play between the actual and the
virtual, and, like Aristotle, it is again concerned with a new type of causality, this time called *disparation*. To this end, I will read Deleuze in tandem with Simondon in that it is with Simondon that Deleuze thinks the concept.

The second half of the paper provides a brief survey of Simondon’s influence on Deleuze by examining how the concept of individuation has been used to help us rearticulate our relations in the domain of informational ontology. Simondon foresaw our networked world and argued for a new philosophy for it well before any of his contemporaries, and in a way that carries import for citizens of network societies. Where traditional theories of communication famously approached the problem by stating it as one of “reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point” (Shannon, 1948, p. 379), the Simondonian model of communication attempts to rescue information from mere transmission and return it to the Aristotelian notion of *dunamis*.

II. Aristotle’s Hylomorphic Substratum

Simondon’s theory of individuation follows a long line of theories that can be traced back to Aristotle. Scotus, Leibniz, Nietzsche, and others have addressed something similar to the theory, sometimes explicitly, other times through an encounter with another concept. I will engage the earliest of these thinkers of individuation (Aristotle), for two reasons. The first is that the three aforementioned thinkers can be said to have developed their own theories of individuation in light of Aristotle’s accomplishments. The second and perhaps more important reason is that Simondon adopts much of Aristotle’s terminology in describing his own theory of individuation, while at the same time making a clean break with the Greek thinker. Like the information theorists he was so fond of, Simondon saves much of the terminology from thinkers whom he disagrees with but nevertheless admires, and Aristotle is no exception.

So what exactly was Simondon’s main contention? Repeatedly, his primary targets throughout his work are, first, the hylomorphism of the ancient Greeks that until Simondon’s time had still maintained pride of place in certain strands of philosophical discourse, and, second, the transmission model of information that was gaining traction after Claude Shannon’s mathematical theory of communication was published in the *Bell System Technical Journal* in 1948 (in the sights of this second target we can also place the work of Norbert Wiener, particularly his book *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, also published in 1948). A clear understanding
of Simondon’s approach to hylomorphism is needed to understand his idiosyncratic reading of the War-era information and communication theorists. It is his unique approach to rethinking the hylomorphic schema that allows Simondon to articulate a notion of disparation in the theory of information that puts him in line with, but also at odds from, the traditional communication theorists of the twentieth century.

How could this old Greek concept matter to us today for a better understanding of our techno-social milieu? Before answering this question, we should understand something of the concept’s origins. Hylomorphism comes from the Greek hylē (ὑλή), which translates to “matter,” and morphē (μορφή), which translates to “form,” and is a philosophical principle that states that natural bodies (substance) contain these two distinct properties. Aristotle analyzes substance in terms of the distinction between matter and form in his Metaphysics, and he adopts the concept of the substratum to accentuate this difference, acting as a third background realm in front of which the previous two work. The words “potentiality,” ὀνεμάς (δύναμης), and “actuality,” entelecheia (ἐντελέχεια), explicates in his Physics, are used throughout to demarcate the difference in type of substratum and substance. Potentiality can be read as something inherently belonging to the substratum, in that the substratum is excluded from actuality. This clear distinction is one that Aristotle maintains throughout the Metaphysics, his text that will be our focus here (specifically, the W. D. Ross translation in The Complete Works of Aristotle edited by Jonathan Barnes). Aristotle tells us that “potency is prior to the actual cause” and that “it is not necessary for everything potential to be actual” (1991, p. 41). Being is something separated, that is still considered as “‘being’ and ‘that which is’” but also “being potentially, and sometimes being actually” (1991, p. 68). For Aristotle there are two distinct types, but most are not really actual; “of the things that are thought to be substances, most are only potentialities” (1991, p. 112). To get to the bottom of primary causality, then, Aristotle poses the formulation, “that in virtue of which,” which is explicates most thoroughly throughout the Metaphysics to clear the way for the idea of the unmovable “prime” or “first” mover (1991, p. 132). He wants to know about universal first causes, and to do so he must necessarily posit something like the substratum that is “that in virtue of which” things move. The substratum is “of itself neither a particular thing nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterized; nor yet negatively” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 91). It is the “stuff” of material reality barren of all form or content; the substratum cannot be pointed to “as such” in that an “as such” would disqualify it as being that in virtue of which we can ask the question “that in virtue of which,” since the substratum is a predicate. Aristotle is clear that the substratum does not yield to
sense since it is in essence insensible (we could also say nonsensical), it exists as potentiality without form or content. This is why the substratum is not really the substance. The substratum is the predicate of substance, before substance actualizes itself as content and as form. Even though we name the substratum, Aristotle tells us, “it remains for us to say what is the substance, in the sense of actuality” (1991, p. 116). The substratum “is the sea” and the actuality or form “is smoothness” and so it becomes obvious then that substance exists “as matter, another as form or actuality; while the third kind is that which is composed of these two” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 117).

So there are clearly three kinds of substance for Aristotle: a “this” that is perceived; a “this” that is a state of nature that it moves towards; and a “this” that is the composite of these two. But the substratum exists outside as the fourth connector to these three types. The substance is applied to the “essence,” the “universal,” and the “genus,” but there is also the substratum, and the “substratum is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 90). The substratum is Aristotle’s unreal predicate of all that is sensible and that actually exists. For Aristotle the substratum is a kind of homogeneous materiality where things do not differ in kind; it does not differ in terms of things that are divisible to sense. Clearly, for Aristotle there is an inaccessible part of “reality” that exists beyond our experience. The example that he gives, like the famous beeswax passage from Descartes’ Second Meditation, is the metaphysical notion that “wine” and “water” are necessarily separate (in actuality), different obviously in kind, but also that “all juices,” oil and wine included, are part and parcel of an undifferentiated and “ultimate substratum” for “all of these are water or air” (1991, p. 66). This new term, the ultimate substratum, makes clear Aristotle’s division in metaphysics, and it follows that substance has “two senses, (a) the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and (b) that which is a ‘this’ and separable—and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 69). Form, in essence, exists separate from the matter of the world.

The notion that allows Aristotle to think individuation and spark off a chain of philosophical events in Western thought is the hylomorphic nature of the substratum. For Aristotle the concept of individuation is wrapped up in an investigation into the meaning of ultimate causality. Aristotle does not use the word “individuation,” but he does describe something close to it when he uses the word “potential” in his writings on causality. While he does not use the word, Simondon for his part refers to and uses a great many terms that we find in Aristotle, most notably: actuality: energeia, entelecheia; axiom: axioma; cause: aition, aitia; change: kinēsis, metabolē; coming to be: genesis;
contradiction: antiphasis; individual: atomon, tode ti; movement: kinesis; potentially: dunamei; and potentiality: dunamis. Simondon reaches back to Aristotle to access terminology that is useful to him to describe his own conception of individuation. The important difference is that for Aristotle the two domains of matter are separate and do not “speak” to one another; form is separated from the substance that is its cause. For Simondon the relationship (if it can be called that) is more complex.

Simondon disagreed with Aristotle (and Kant) and began advancing another position as early as the 1950s. In Parrhesia’s translation of the introduction to L’individuation psychique et collective, Simondon states, “we must detach ourselves from the hylomorphic schema; there is no sensation that would represent a matter that would be an a posteriori given for the a priori forms of sensibility” (2009, p. 9). Right away, he makes a break with the notion that form can be separated from matter; there is no such thing as a sensation that can exist on its own that will “match up” with pre-given forms or types of matter. “According to the hylomorphic schema,” he tells us, “the individuated being is not already given at the moment one considers the matter and the form that will become the sunolon” (2009, p. 5), sunolon (σύνολον) here being derived from the Greek word for sun (σύν), implying togetherness, process, resemblance, or addition. The point is that sensation does not link up to matter, but that matter sensitizes “us” (it would be more correct to say simply that “matter sensitizes”). Simondon claims, in L’individuation psychique et collective, that with regard to knowledge this “leads Aristotle to empiricism, since it is the individual who is first and who holds the power of the future” (2007, p. 42, my translation) by being the receiver of experience. Man literally “holds” the future in that it is through his pronunciation (release) of observation (experience) that a materiality is inferred and affected. This is in direct contrast to the futurity inherent to a type of causality that Simondon will later articulate. The previous claim places man at the center of individuation in that “man can rely on meeting the individual being sensitive enough to found knowledge”; in this schema, “form no longer contains the whole of knowledge” (Simondon, 2007, p. 42, my translation) in that man as sense and experience produces knowledge of the material world. Empirical grounding of knowledge through man as mediator of sense and form leads to a type of inductive reasoning that Simondon critiques, this time in the third part of Du mode d’existence des objets techniques. He continues his attack on hylomorphism, this time engaging, in perhaps the most important section, a sustained critique of induction in its relation to individuation (and, by extension, causality). He writes:
What induction takes hold of, what it starts from, is an element that in itself is not sufficient and complete, and does not constitute a unity; so, it exceeds each particular element by combining it with other elements that are themselves particular, in order to find an analogue of unity: in induction there is a search for the ground of reality from figural elements that are fragments; to try to find a law beneath phenomena, as in the induction of Bacon and Stuart Mill, or to try to find only what is common to all individuals of a given species, as in Aristotle’s induction, is to postulate that beyond the plurality of phenomena and of individuals there exists a stable and common ground for reality, that is the unity of the real. (2010, p. 26)

Induction, in the Simondonian schema, here closely resembles Hume’s radical problematization of inductive knowing (what he calls “causal inference”). In Hume’s problem of induction, explicated in Book I, Part III, section VI of the Treatise of Human Nature, induction is concluded to be that which does not call to experience to prove the effect of a cause and effect by way of experiential reason, but by the imaginary association of particulars, constituting what Simondon here calls an “analogue of unity.” This “analogue of unity” is like the association of relations of perception in Hume that produces the following problem: if these relations really were produced by our understanding, then we would have to conclude that nature experienced or not is in some way equivalent to that which has already been experienced. This is obviously not the case (since things are always changing). The “analogue of unity” is just that, a fabricated correspondence that does not equate perfect similarity in that otherwise it would cease to be an analogue, and it is by this very requirement that the inductive apparatus fails to satisfy its own demands that it places on itself, in particular the call to natural uniformity. Simondon is here appealing to the same problem that was located in his critique of Aristotle’s notion of the hylomorphism of the substratum; in the same way that we cannot have a “pure” or “true” sense of induction, nor can we have a purely linear notion of causality that separates substratum from form from sensation. This does not mean that Simondon practiced only critique. In the following section, I show how Simondon was able to overcome Aristotle’s hylomorphic substratum with the creation of two concepts—individuation and disparation—and how Deleuze takes up these concepts, eventually fleshing them out into a multimodal philosophy of individuation.
III. Deleuze and Simondon: Informational Individuation

Part of the reason such a detour through Aristotle is necessary for an understanding of Simondon’s ontology is that Simondon sought to replace the notion of form, which was so important to Aristotle, with that of information (Simondon, 2007, p. 28). Where Aristotle had separated form and matter to one side and substratum to another to get to the bottom of the problem of causality, Simondon instead sought to close the gap, to show that form was always the wrong category, that there is nothing transcendental in matter itself that would exist “above,” “before,” or “beyond” its so-called attributes. In doing so, he makes a radical call for immanent ontology, but it is not just ontology. Contrary to the claims of some Deleuzeans, the inherited ontology that Deleuze received from Simondon, and later modified, included a reorienting of epistemology proper. We would not be being sufficiently Deleuzean if we claimed that ontology was all that changed in the immanentization of thought. Without going too far into it, anti-individualism and, to some degree, its sister, semantic externalism, is a strand in epistemology that can be compatible with a Simondonian philosophy of individuation (but that is a project for another paper). Simondon does not abandon the categories of “consciousness,” “psychology,” “mentality,” and “epistemology.” It is true that he approached “the question of epistemology as a function of ontogenesis” (Massumi, 2009, p. 37), but this does not equal the poverty of the epistemological in Simondon’s thought. Rather, he formulates a “technical mentality” that has individuation as its mode of operation (Simondon, 2009b).

Leaving questions of epistemology aside, there are three concepts that are relevant to an understanding of Simondon’s appeal not only to Deleuze but also to those who are engaged in the resurrection of Simondon’s theoretical legacy today. They are the concepts of information, individuation, and disparation, and while they might seem familiar we should understand how Simondon put them to work in a different way than is usually provided. First, Simondon does not view information in the same way as information’s most well-known theorists. Where Shannon and Wiener saw information as a measurable entity sent from a sender to a receiver, Simondon adopts a radical notion of the term that might seem completely counterintuitive to the old wartime category of those famous cryptologists. Secondly, individuation and disparation, while perhaps familiar to Deleuzeans, are still concepts that the lay communication theorist has yet to grasp, and we would benefit from re-examining just how unique Simondon’s articulation of these terms was (and still is) at the time of his writing. Information itself has no meaning for Simondon in terms of a structural relation or pattern or “entropy” within a closed, circular system; it is something that populates what he calls the
“preindividual field” (Simondon, 2009a, p. 6). It is the *disparation* between two realms—the actual and the virtual in Deleuze—that activates the information and produces a process of individuation that *comes from the future*. As far removed as his notion of information was from that of its original theorists, so too was the distance between Simondon’s notion of causality and traditional Aristotelian metaphysics.

In Simondon’s minor thesis, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, he describes this unique approach to the problem of causality, stating that there exists in every event of causality an area that is “the theatre of a number of relationships of reciprocal causality” (1980, p. 25). Added to this “theatre,” he continues, “in the incompatibilities that arise from the progressive saturation of the system of sub-sets there is discoverable an indefiniteness in limitations, and the transcending of these limitations is what constitutes progress” (1980, p. 25). Progress here should be read neutrally; Simondon is not advocating a type of evolution. Instead, we see here already the beginnings of Simondon’s notion that for true change to occur it is less a matter of bodies acting on other bodies than it is a reformulation of matter along the lines of a constellation of information. Rather than thinking in terms of “motion,” “force,” and “bodies” in terms of causality, Simondon thinks in terms of “threshold,” “code,” “limit,” and “information.” The most important distinction, and one that will become clear, is that for Simondon information is what structures reality; however, it itself is not a structure. More accurately, information is that which, depending on the way that it comes into contact with another abstraction of itself, unlocks or “clicks” into another form of reality. In *L’individuation psychique et collective*, Simondon articulates this process. Unlike the Aristotelian notion of a hylomorphic substratum, information for Simondon is not a homogenous entity that exists beyond the ken of causality since it itself, positioned as a new type of “unmovable mover,” might be a universal cause. Rather, information, always in the event of individuation, is caught between two planes of actuality. He formulates this clearly, denying “the hypotheses according to which information is only ever on a single plane of homogeneous reality” in favour of another where information exists in “two orders of a disparation” (2007, p. 22).

In breaking with the Aristotelian notion of a hylomorphic substratum, Simondon is concerned with “modulation” instead of “mold” and process over substance. He equates the metastable with what Constantin Boundas calls a virtual/real and the new with an actual/virtual (2005, p. 129). Part of the reason that Simondon’s philosophy is able to find an alternative route around that of Aristotle is due to Simondon’s engaging the cybernetic heritage and his reimagining of the informational paradigm, leading to a new philosophy of causality. In what remains, I will read Simondon’s appropriation of information
theory terminology in light of Deleuze’s appropriation of Simondon’s concepts. The Deleuze references to Simondon are sparse, but I would like to point to a few key examples to utilize Deleuze’s superior formulation of the concepts, and to “bridge the gap,” as it were, between the two. Since I progress according to the development of Deleuze’s thought, the first of the three most useful references is found in Chapter V, “Assymetrical Synthesis of the Sensible,” from Deleuze’s own thesis, *Difference and Repetition*. In it, Deleuze engages in what is probably the most important early encounter with Simondon’s work. He writes:

Gilbert Simondon has shown recently that individuation presupposes a prior metastable state—in other words, the existence of a “disparateness” such as at least two orders of magnitude or two scales of heterogeneous reality between which potentials are distributed. Such a pre-individual state nevertheless does not lack singularities: the distinctive or singular points are defined by the existence and distribution of potentials. An “objective” problematic field thus appears, determined by the distance between two heterogeneous orders. Individuation emerges like the act of solving such a problem, or—what amounts to the same thing—like the actualisation of a potential and establishing of communication between disparates. (1994, p. 246)

We should pay particular attention to the word “communication” here. It is interesting that Deleuze, having surely read at least Simondon’s smaller thesis at this point, does not use the word “information” to explicate the notion of what he calls “singularities.” By using the word “communication” we see that he is probably aware of the significance of Simondon’s terminology, and that it has been appropriated from the cybernetic paradigm. One way to read this is that Deleuze, following Simondon, did not want to fall into the trap of sounding like he is reducing this transaction of “potentials” in a similar fashion as the very information theorists that Simondon sought to distance himself from. In any event, the “two orders of magnitude” clearly indicate Deleuze’s acceptance of the Simondonian maneuvering around Aristotle’s hylomorphic substratum. The “two heterogeneous orders” produce what is, far from what might be seen as the “subjective” or anti-realistic position of *disparation*, an “objective” problematic field that is the location of the act of individuation. *Disparation* will become one of Deleuze’s most important concepts here; it is the process of two-way becoming via a universal problematic.
While *The Logic of Sense* contains Deleuze’s most explicit and lengthy reference to Simondon, it takes the form of a direct quote, and for our purposes here it will be enough to paraphrase. Quoting from *L’individu et sa génèse physico-biologique*, Deleuze uses Simondon to show that “events do not occupy the surface but rather frequent it” and that “energy is not localized at the surface, but is rather bound to its formation and reformation” (Deleuze, 1990, pp. 103–104). What Deleuze is trying to evoke here is Simondon’s notion that there is no metaphysical “gap” between different levels of substance in terms of “events” but rather only the way in which the events themselves comprise the very formation of reality. He is trying to say that they (events) produce structure and are not themselves structured. The passage is similar to one Deleuze provides in the deceivingly short yet complex text “May ’68 Did Not Take Place.” In it, Deleuze says that “the possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event. It is a question of life. The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity” (2006b, p. 234). He goes on to say in the footnote to *The Logic of Sense* reference that Simondon’s “entire book … has a special importance, since it presents the first thought-out theory of impersonal and pre-individual singularities. It proposes explicitly, beginning with these singularities, to work out the genesis of the living individual and the knowing subject. It is therefore a new conception of the transcendental” (1990, p. 344). Deleuze states that everything he has been articulating in *The Logic of Sense* has been “analyzed by Simondon” and that his material “depends directly on this book [Simondon’s *L’individu et sa génèse physico-biologique*]” (1990, p. 344). Beyond Deleuze’s obvious indebtedness to Simondon, this passage is important in that it is the first clear statement on how the process of individuation leads directly to and produces something like “real” phenomenological reality on both ends of the spectrum (the human apprehending reality and reality itself). Here we finally receive a detailed explanation of what is explicitly acknowledged as a new transcendental process, one that is constructed out of the singularities that are generated by the “objective” field of the universal problematic. Deleuze is giving us here the ingredients for his “transcendental empiricism.”

Deleuze and Guattari quote Simondon in two places in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They write that he thinks past the hylomorphic divide, that “Simondon exposes the technological insufficiency of the matter-form model, in that it assumes a fixed form and a matter deemed homogeneous … Simondon demonstrates that the hylomorphic model leaves many things, active and affective, by the wayside” (2005, p. 408). And later: “In short, what Simondon criticizes the hylomorphic model for is taking form and matter to be two terms defined separately, like the ends of two half-chains whose connection can no
longer be seen, like a simple relation of molding behind which there is a perpetually variable, continuous modulation that it is no longer possible to grasp” (2005, p. 409). There is not much new here; this critique of hylomorphism had been well established already by Deleuze. Instead, we get information on the “continuous modulation” that lies behind the schema, out of reach and out of touch with reality.

It is with the Foucault book that Deleuze articulates the most profound rumination on Simondon’s philosophy (again, very subtly and without much fanfare; Simondon’s name is relegated to endnote status). Here, Deleuze describes in detail the aforementioned futurity inherent to the Simondonian model of causality, which will lead us to the “danger” that will end this paper. Deleuze writes:

We have shown how any organization (differentiation and integration) presupposed the primary topological structure of an absolute outside and inside that encourages relative intermediary exteriorities and interiorities: every inside-space is topologically in contact with the outside-space, independent of distance and on the limits of a “living”; and this carnal or vital topology, far from showing up in space, frees a sense of time that fits the past into the inside, brings about the future in the outside, and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of the living present. (2006a, p. 97)

The first half of this passage is similar to the one from The Logic of Sense in that Deleuze is concerned with describing how the process of individuation is embedded in the very reality of things and not “on top” of them as if it were a simple 2D “mapping” schema (he does not mention “individuation” by name, but since Simondon is referenced in the footnote immediately following this passage, we can assume Deleuze had the process in mind, especially since he is describing a process similar to that described in other passages on individuation). The process of individuation, then, here alluded to as a 3D topology, is what knots and contorts our reality; it is the fabric of existence, folding the future and the past into the present. But the second part of the passage contains a weirder realism. Deleuze describes the space as “carnal” and “vital,” here connoting something crude, sexual, full-blooded, and obscene. Why describe this weird realism so? But then we have it; this space does not occur “in” space (space as definite and measured by a linear notion of time) but rather “frees” time so that space bends time to its will, so that the past occurs at the “inside” and the future occurs at the “outside,” apparently implying the reversibility of time and of the causality of events. Although Deleuze does not
state this explicitly, the passage seems to point to a fundamental notion: the realism that is articulated by this topology, as an individuation of reality, is made up of a \textit{disparation} that is itself only information. If individuation is comprised of a \textit{disparation} of two levels of information, then “all” of that information is perpetually “here,” already the now of a future-present. What is traditionally considered the “past” or “present” is merely the \textit{disparation} of an immanent information source that is always in the process of resolving itself. What this means then, in terms of Simondon’s rearticulation of the classical theory of information, is that we are no longer involved in the “circular causality” of cybernetics (sender$\rightarrow$message$\rightarrow$receiver) but instead are involved in the immanent diffusion of informational properties that control and structure our lives. If this is the case, Deleuze’s “warnings” in his short but powerful text, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” should be taken seriously. But that is a question for another paper. There are significant concepts in Simondon’s philosophy that deserve just as much attention as those of “individuation” and “\textit{disparation}.” Such rich concepts as “technical mentality,” “phase-shift,” “allagmatics,” “multimodality,” “interoperability,” “preindividual,” but most especially Simondon’s concept of “\textit{concrétisation},” which is so important but has barely been the object of study, deserve to be properly addressed at length. Deleuze could have named the new philosophy he found in Simondon; we will call it the philosophy of information.
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SPECIAL SEMIOTIC CHARACTERS: 
WHAT IS AN OBSTACLE-SIGN?

GARY GENOSKO

In Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1977) there is a pre-panoptic discussion of an art of signification that places representation at the heart of the public communication of a highly diverse array of punishments. Within the logic of exposition, Foucault’s discussion of the “gentle way of punishing” precedes the production of “docile bodies” and the improbable emergence of imprisonment in a “coercive institution” as a general form of punishment; in the process, the “picturesque”—to use Rudy Visker’s emphasis (1995; Foucault 1977)—penalties previously imagined by reformers are superseded. Foucault’s question is, how did prison detention become “one of the most general forms of punishment?” (120). I want to reframe this question: what was lost when the prison became “one of the most general forms of punishment”? What, in short, can be learned today from a semiotics of reform in which representation and not coercion of the individual through a “concerted orthopaedy” (130) is the goal of the penalty; where signs are not displaced by exercises, and the locus of the power to punish includes special semiotic characters that perfuse a so-called “punitive city”?

Regaining this semiogram of power will contribute to our task of bringing a Foucauldian meditation to bear upon the analysis of the neoliberal surveillance state. My specific goal is to extract and describe the features of special semiotic characters called “obstacle-signs” (*signes-obstacles*) from Foucault’s account of what he calls a “dream” of penal reform dating from the eighteenth century that died and gave way to the “great uniform machinery of the prisons” (116). The signifieds of obstacle-signs were reduced, that is, “colonized,” by prison, following the disappearance of public torture and the dissipation of the whiff of abuse and illegality that prison previously carried.

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1 All quotations from Foucault’s 1977 edition of *Discipline and Punish* will be referenced by page number only.
My task is to show the enduring relevance of obstacle-signs for critically apprehending our current situation within a burgeoning neoliberal condition. But first, a certain amount of explication of Foucault’s text is in order, to be followed by a reflection on the semiotic character of the obstacle-sign.

Semio-technique

Foucault describes how changes during the second half of the eighteenth century regarding property laws and the development of capitalism in the forms of intensive agriculture, investment in manufacturing, transportation, and port expansion provided the bourgeoisie with a privileged domain suited to its political machinations. Notably, these reforms also effectively introduced a “new economy” of punishment based not on spectacle, confused principles, and haphazard applications but on “continuity and permanence” (87). This “new economy” required individuals to accept a contract with society; those who break this contract through criminal acts become the enemies of society. The part and whole are related in this way: the least crime attacks the whole of society, and the whole of society is present in the least punishment. In this way, punishment is generalized, Foucault underlines. This struggle between part and whole is “unequal” (90) since the power to punish belongs only to society; vengeance should play no role. Instead, the question of punishment is the defence of society and the expression of the humane sensibility of the lawmakers, yet implying a principle of calculation deep within it (91) that attends to the recoil effects of punishment upon those who exercise it; attention is given, in other words, to the “effects of power” (92). Punishment is an “art of effects” (93). It is a matter of economy and proportion formulated to “prevent repetition” (93). Reference back to the crime in the punishment must be “discreet.” Punishment is not an example that allows for the reappearance of either crime or sovereign power; punishment therefore is a punitive “sign that serves as an obstacle” (94) and has six major rules.

Briefly, the six rules of this semio-technique are:

1. **Minimum quantity**: Reduce the advantages that a crime creates for the criminal by stripping away what is desirable about it while creating greater interest in avoiding the penalty.

2. **Sufficient ideality**: Given rule 1, the “pain” of punishment must function as an ideality, an “idea” and not a
“corporal reality,” a representation, which punishment maximizes.

(3) **Lateral effects concern the centrifugalization of the effects of punishment**: The effects of punishment spread centrifugally and must be managed. The goal is to “make others [other than the criminal] believe that he [the criminal] has been punished” (95), and to do so in a lasting way.

(4) **Perfect certainty**: Constitute by means of representational signs a “necessary and unbreakable” (95) link between the crime and its particular punishment. This entails a clarity of consequences and publication of written legislation and the speeches of magistrates; open access to records should also be guaranteed. Here Foucault introduces an important feature: in order to realize the perception of certainty, “no crime committed must escape the gaze of those whose task it is to dispense justice” (96).

(5) **Common truth**: Verification of the crime must obey accepted principles of truth in the arguments, proofs, and judgments that support it. This requires a transition from “ritual” acts to “common” instruments (“reason possessed by everyone” in which one is innocent until proven guilty) (97).

(6) **Optimal specification**: In “penal semiotics” (98) illegalities must be rigorously and comprehensively defined and coded, classified, categorized in a taxonomy of punishments, with no excesses or loopholes: an airtight semiotics in which there is a “total coincidence between all possible offences and the effects-signs of punishment” (98). Additionally, the “criminal himself” must be considered so that punishment may be “individualized” in a “dyad” of mutual reinforcement: “individualization appears as the ultimate aim of a precisely adapted code” (99).
Punishment could be “modulated” according to the defendant’s character, way of life, history, quality of will (99). The code and individualization scheme were developed in relation to natural history taxonomies, specifically the Linnaean taxonomy. The code was laid out in a great table, a spreadsheet, divided into crimes according to their objects and then into gradations of species, from which comparisons to another table of penalties could be made. This “double taxonomy” was more of a “dream” than a reality (100).

**Obstacle-signs**

Transitioning, then, from generalized punishment to the “gentle way in punishment,” Foucault explores the role of the “technology of representation” in punishment through what he calls “obstacle-signs” (104). The role of representation is to rob the crime of its attraction by communicating its disadvantages by means of such signs, thus constituting a “new arsenal of penalties” (104). The six conditions under which these types of signs function follow:

1. Avoid arbitrariness as much as possible; be “as unarbitrary [peu arbitraires] as possible” (104). Such signs are “analogue” (based on resemblance and proximity) in design in as much as a specific punishment is immediately and transparently signified by the thought of a crime, the signified acting as a deterrent that “diverts the mind” from going down the road of that commission: “the transparency of the sign to that which it signifies” (106) is aimed at all those experiencing the representation. The semiotic relation is between signifier (crime) and signified (punishment). The link would be immediate, stable, almost natural as far as its “sequencing” is concerned. This notion of the natural sign meant that vainglory would be punished by humiliation, murder by death, theft by confiscation (105). In other words, punishment underlines the “symbolic communication” between the crime and its “analogue penalties” (105). Today, in some constituencies, chemical castration for repeat sex offenders and the death penalty for serial murderers appear to retain this symbolic principle of communication.

2. Signs engage with and subdue, weaken, dissipate forces of desire, attraction, and sundry intensities and pleasures of crime. Force is marshalled against force, good habits against bad passions: it is advised to “set the force that drove the criminal to the crime against itself” (106). In this sense punishment is an irritant that upsets the pleasures and rewards of criminality. But this is not only a negative operation. Additionally, Foucault describes how...
what is useful and respectful must be rebuilt, “reanimated” so that “the penalty that forms stable and easily legible signs must also recompose the economy of interests and the dynamics of passions” (107).

(3) The idea of the penalty involves a “temporal modulation” (107), that is, it is not permanent. Torture was no stranger to temporal considerations, and duration became a way of transformation rather than not ordeal. Diminishing intensities and greater leniencies are thus imagined as internally variable yet nonetheless fixed sequences.

(4) Punishment is not only directed at the convict: for him, the penalty is an obstacle-sign with a tight fit between crime and punishment, but the reach of the sign extends beyond the guilty to the “potentially guilty” (108) and is meant to circulate widely and rapidly, find acceptance and redistribution, shaping inter-individual discourse about crime’s falsehood. In this way public good can be made of convicts. They provide physical labour and perform a semiotic service “by the signs that [they] produce” (109). The latter is the greater utility because semiotic action is required against crimes yet to be committed and crimes not yet conceived of, but which would be decodable within this penal semiotics and the coordinates of the taxonomical spreadsheet.

(5) Terror may have been engraved on the memories of those who witnessed public executions, but obstacle-signs are “decipherable” by all. This results from the “learned economy of publicity” (109) in which obstacle-signs deliver unambiguously decodable moral lessons. They radiate a clarity of message evident to all. Another “double” emerges: the double affliction of the citizen who ignores the law and becomes in the process a criminal “lost” to society (110). Sadness and mourning rather than vengeance are the emotions proper to this ritual; the effect is not terror, but a legible publicity of punishment: “it must open up a book to be read” (111).

(6) In making the criminal a source of instruction, the “dubious glory” of the criminal may be extinguished. This requires constant reinforcement by the circulation of obstacle-signs. The “positive mechanics” of which recode punishment so that the pleasures of crime are diminished and crowded out in popular discourse by fear of punishment. Discourse as the vehicle of punishment captures poetry, popular tales, folklore, the moral lessons that parents tell their children: the imaginary “punitive city” is perfused with public obstacle-signs.

According to the logic just presented, imprisonment or detention would correspond to a crime such as kidnapping or hostage taking. It is the sort of punishment that suits a specific type of crime and is analogically related to it.
is semiotically coherent: “it will be important to avoid utilizing the same punishment for different crimes—which would be like using the same word to say different things. Instead of putting lazy vagabonds in prison, put them to work” (Ransom 1997). In other words, imprisonment lacks specificity when used generally and it is criticized in this way by reformers who believed it to be counterproductive. Foucault writes, “prison as the universal penalty is incompatible with this whole technique of penalty-effect, penalty representation, penalty-general function, penalty-sign and discourse” (114–15). Still, by 1810, it occupied “almost the entire field of possible punishments” (115). In all of its manifestations, prison was a “monotonous figure … of the power to punish” (116).

Special Characters

Obstacle-signs are framed in the terms of a conceptual language with which we are familiar from structural linguistics, but the specification of the conditions of signification are divergent: the relationship between the signifier and signified of an obstacle-sign diminishes in arbitrariness as resemblance, analogy, and proximity are underlined as the principles of motivation governing the system of crimes and punishments. Obstacle-signs need to be rendered starkly transparent and intelligible so that the unity of the signifier and signified cannot be shaken or diverted by the affective charms of crime or the hope of nondetection either through a blind spot of signification or a fuzzy polysemy. This requires reinforcement through a comprehensive and intensive mediatization—the “ever-open book” to be read by all (111). Thus, a semiotic must be cruel in its clarity and cold in its ineluctability, yet delivered through a landscape perfused with “tiny theatres of punishment” (113) where discourse and performance deliver the strictest of lessons and semiotic disobedience is minimized. Therein representation is not at all festive and engages multiple media as well as linear textual and visual modalities (posters and heraldry). Recalling Jean Baudrillard’s (1993) discussion of the sure signs of a symbolic order prior to the emergence of modern signs marked by simulacra, obstacle-signs answer to this transparency of certainty and circumscribed circulation as lessons in prohibition, acceptance, and submission.

Obstacle-signs are positive in the sense that they are defined by the fullness of the motivated relations between signifier and signified rather than solely by the negative differences between signifiers and their meaning effects as the source of their meaning within the penal code. The translation of the recurring phrase *jeu de signes-obstacles* by “complex of obstacle-signs” (106 and 108) allows the weight of an ensemble as code to come through but without
resorting to the more structural language of system. The signified is not an effect of the structural interdependence of signifiers. Each obstacle-sign is quite specific in its construction; the uniformization of the penalty by prison effectively destroyed the internal diversity of obstacle-signs. Recalling Fredric Jameson’s (1991) analysis of postmodernism in which the interdependency of signifiers “snaps,” revealing the “rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers,” Foucault’s description of a pre-modern semiotic imaginary is likewise snapped over the course of some twenty years (approximately between 1790 and 1810) in which the signified is banalized and monotonized as a single kind of penalty that is no longer “telling” in relation to the specific offence committed. While Jameson describes the schizophrenic consequences of the snapping of the signifying chain in which a subject is “engulfed” in the “vividness” of an isolated signifier heavy with affect, we may see in the transformation of the signified as imprisonment, the general form of punishment, not only an evacuation of variation, but a stripping away of the communicative effect in which a subject no longer confronts obstacle-signs that warn against specific criminal activities at every turn. Rather, with the disappearance of the public signscape of crime-punishment scenarios, and their multiple activations of fear and acceptance, this movement is also a desocialization that escapes into the coercive institution of prison. Signs are replaced by architectures. The opposite of prison’s generalization of the signified is the inability to find a signified. A loosening of the analogical tightness of the sign may be described by the intrusion of an obtuse factor, what Roland Barthes (1977, 54) theorized as an excessive and elusive supplementary dimension of meaning. Such indifference to obviousness challenges the clarity of the obstacle-sign, and the result is a “signifier without a signified” (61). Thus, a representation that fails to communicate a specific punishment has broken down. It is not necessarily bad theatre, but a theatre not in control of the effects of its representations, and unable to manage the accents emerging from it. Foucault does not acknowledge that among the hundreds of tiny theatres attempting to communicate to the “potential guilty” that there must have been, in this vision of reform, not only aberrant significations but challenges to the machinery of representation. For the obtuse, as Barthes explains, resists description and representation.

“Hundreds of Tiny Theatres of Punishment”

Within the neoliberal diagram of power, governing through wars on crime is a standard conservative strategy. The dream of a public and “permanent lexicon of crime and punishment” (111) suggests to me Ronald Reagan’s utilization of
anti-drunk driving legislation in the early 1980s (see Lerner 2011). In this era, federal legislation normalized blood alcohol content levels, enshrined license suspension and mandatory penalties, and established better law enforcement. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act was also passed during this era with the support of groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), who advocated for victims’ rights and found a fertile political and media environment for its cause. If we consider the desired effects of obstacle-signs to be beyond the convicted to the “potentially guilty,” then the ways in which they shape discourse, annotate, and even revise the book to be read, as it were, is especially pertinent.

In the case of drunk driving, the link between the presence of a blood alcohol content at or above the minimum as the single causal factor in 50 percent of car crash fatalities cemented the signifier-signified relation in which the crime of drunk driving (blood alcohol level) and its punishment (analogically understood as a suspension of one’s license to drive, and later, in terms of proximity, cars that test such levels and block ignition) circulated in mass media and exercised a remarkable moral authority, for a short time. The publication of the names of those convicted of driving while intoxicated reveals what Foucault considered a double payment of the convicted: the consequences of a DWI (driving while intoxicated) conviction and the production of obstacle-signs for those who might consider driving (or operating another kind of vehicle like a boat) after or while consuming any amount of alcohol; ultimately, this would bleed together intoxication and driving under the influence. Of course, the overdetermination of the idea of “drunk driving” (as opposed to “drink driving”) and the isolation of the single most important cause of car crash fatalities as blood alcohol content (as opposed to alcohol’s behavioural effects on driving ability) were criticized by multifactorial causal analysis and re-examination of the myth of the drunk driver as the “villain of traffic safety” (Lerner 2011, 97). But this villain, as a “rentable property” (109), once put into circulation, effectively “recoded” drunk driving as the act of an “enemy” of society, assisting in the diminishment of any value accruing around the desire to engage in such activity, and therein limiting appeals to alibis such as tolerance for social drinking and recourse to populist nostrums like having “one for the road.”

Yet these ideas persist in the popular imagination because alcohol still forms part of a preparation kit for driving under certain, perceived-to-be-difficult circumstances (e.g., driving at night, in the snow). It is hard to describe this persistence of the obtuse, as Barthes taught, because it resists articulation. At the same time, the blurriness of the obtuse may be redeployed and is regularly integrated into representations of perceptual impairment through the
lens of alcohol (i.e., seeing the world through the bottom of a empty glass of beer). The anti-drunk driving “serious theatre” of the punitive city is perhaps best witnessed in the MADD red ribbon and other campaign materials, liquor control board moral messaging, and holiday clampdowns at the roadside. These campaigns attempt to lock-in the signifier-signified relation of drunk driving-license suspension by scare tactics. The signified of license suspension is a “telling” punishment, as is the installation of an ignition locking device—so-called “alcholocks”—for repeat offenders. But since the 1980s one may see in the penalty for street racing—vehicle impoundment—a similar obstacle-sign of a “safe roads” code working in concert with other driving penalties. What I am maintaining is that for a brief period in the 1980s the legible lesson of the crime and punishment ligature was tightly wound in the spirit of obstacle-signs. But this period gave way to confusion among different constituencies (states and provinces) about the language of driving while intoxicated and driving under the influence (DUI is known in Canada as impaired driving, yet it persists in the common language as it is undoubtedly inspired by television cop shows).

Obstacle-signs appear to be “naturally” politically conservative and support a moral mission through multimedia representation, what we now call in Canada a “punishment agenda” and “governing through crime” in the United States; conversely, the political use of public drinking by a subculture to carve out a space for itself is arguably restricted to similar conservative outcomes, in addition to the proliferation of obstacle-signs (Marcus 2005, 271). They also still give way to either the generalization of punishment in the form of prison and mass incarceration. The eighteenth- and twentieth-century examples share this generalization of punishment. Because they communicate the kind of “certainty” that reduces what Foucault terms the “coefficient of improbability” (96) that otherwise loosens the bond between crime and penalty, a further apparatus is required. Surveillance—the “gaze of those whose task it is to dispense justice” (96)—is the means by which this reduction would take place in support of the surety of laws, their publication, and advertisement, yet Foucault only pursues the issue of the gaze (single-normalizing-permanent) within the context of disciplinary institutions (173–74), that is, after dispensing with obstacle-signs. It is less remarkable that the gaze appears within the discussion of obstacle-signs than the loss of the explicit study of signs (not the power of ideas and diagrams) in Foucault’s subsequent treatments of the contributions of the human sciences to the prison’s productivity in its fabrication of individuals (delinquents) as effects of power/knowledge. The contribution of signs to “epistemological power” (Foucault 2002) appears limited to a brief and somewhat dreamy historical moment, and quickly pales beside psychiatry and criminology, and is thrown out by Foucault with the
bathwater of “structure.”

Foucault does not concern himself with the semiotic vicissitudes of the punitive city. Further, even though he has at his disposal an understanding of the unwieldy nature of public corporal punishment based on his analysis of the theatricality of public torture and the political problems created by the public’s behaviour (e.g., making the criminal a hero, mocking the sovereign, generating new and dangerous solidarities), he does not transfer and apply this to the “punitive city.” This is undoubtedly due to his inclusion of semio-techniques among all of the refinements of penal reform; that is, all of the ways to make punishment more subtle, more logical, more balanced, more qualitatively nuanced. Hence, a shift from the referent to the sign, from the real to the ideal, in the (re)presentation of crime and punishment: the theatre replaces the scaffold, semiosis substitutes for ritual.

As I have suggested in this article, obstacle-signs are special semiotic characters that have a more recent history, remain in circulation today, and are well-adapted to specific political climates and temperaments for demonstrations in reactionary civics. The survival of certain obstacle-signs does not mean the “punitive city” of dispersal and diversity of control has been realized, even in the most theatricalized “gradations” of community correction/treatment schemes (Cohen 1979). These surviving signs carry with them, however, obstacles to a future made tense by the perceived need to prevent its inevitability—both by the potentially innocent (exonerated guilty) and by their nefarious others.
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TWEETS SPEAK:
INDEFINITE DISCIPLINE IN THE AGE OF TWITTER

STEVEN JAMES MAY

It was clear to anyone attempting a stroll through the downtown core of Toronto, Canada during the city’s 2010 G20 Summit that the Toronto Police Service (TPS), along with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and other Canadian police services that comprised the ad hoc G20 Toronto Integrated Security Unit (ISU), were doing their best to manage the flow of people across the city. In addition to fencing off downtown streets and issuing special ID cards to residents and commuters, the Toronto Police Service was also doing its best to manage the flow of information during the G20, specifically information shared across the online microblogging platform Twitter.com.

This article explains how three North American police services have extended technologies of discipline via the monitoring and use of Twitter during and between mega-events such as the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit. Mega-events are defined as “high-profile, deeply symbolic affairs that typically circulate from host city to host city” (Boyle & Haggerty, 2009, p. 257). Taking as case studies the 2009 Pittsburgh G20 Summit, Toronto’s G20 Summit in 2010, and the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City, the Twitter-related arrests of activists at these mega-events reveal the ongoing work of maintaining “indefinite” discipline (Foucault, 1977, p. 213) in North America. Furthermore, any citizen’s decision to share, or not to share, information on Twitter (information otherwise often publicly available) at any time also falls within the scope of such ongoing surveillance of Twitter, where users of the platform find themselves increasingly complicit in the work of their own discipline.

Twitter as a Site of Discipline
As Michel Foucault observed, police services in the West have had, since the eighteenth century, the dual responsibility of both apprehending criminals and...
shepherding “the indefinite world of a supervision that seeks ideally to reach the most elementary particle” (1977, pp. 214–215). Police services have, according to Foucault, “extended an intermediary network, acting where they could not intervene, disciplining the non-disciplinary spaces” (1977, p. 215). Such disciplining, as defined by Foucault, is “a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology” (1977, p. 215). The job of the police then is, in part, to “assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole” (Foucault, 1977, p. 216). For example, the invitation made by the ISU leading up to the 2010 G20 Summit for Toronto residents and commuters to apply for special ID cards in advance of the summit was a disciplinary measure to direct the entire population of the city to comply with security measures. By willingly turning over personal information and proving to the police that they had a legitimate reason to be in Toronto’s downtown core, these ID holders were rewarded with hassle-free and speedy passage through the city. Those who did not apply for the “optional” ID cards risked being late for work, having their belongings randomly searched, and possible detainment. As Mark Andrejevic states, “increasingly individualized forms of governance” relate to the “offloading of the duties of monitoring associated with a panoptic regime onto the distributed subjects of the gaze” (2005, p. 485). Citing Foucault (1977), Andrejevic describes the “goal of panoptic discipline is not just to produce ‘docile bodies,’ but to maximize the body ‘as a useful force’ (221) to amplify, to ‘increase production, to develop the economy, to increase and multiply’” (2005, p. 485).

Foucault’s notion of “useful” bodies, along with Andrejevic’s concept of lateral surveillance involving “peer-to-peer surveillance of spouses, friends and relatives” (2005, p. 481), reveal the rewards of not posting certain information to Twitter. When users refrain from tweeting or re-tweeting activist-related mega-event information to Twitter, they are rewarded with hassle-free passage through Twitter’s “real-time information network that connects (them) to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what (they) find interesting” (Twitter, n.d.). Alternatively, those Twitter users who do not refrain from sharing activist-related mega-event information risk jeopardizing such hassle-free use of the platform. Posts made to Twitter during and between mega-events represent a type of disciplinary amplification mentioned by Andrejevic, one that is directed at leveraging the work of tweeting and teaching tweeters to tweet as if someone is always watching.

The link between tweeting and discipline was succinctly highlighted by Toronto Police Service Deputy Chief Peter Sloly at a 2011 social media launch one year after the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit. At the press conference
announcing the TPS’s new social media presence and officer training program as “a means of extending (police) reach to all members of the community” (Toronto Police Service, n.d.), Sloly noted how the police were adjusting to social media’s “decentralized, high-speed, highly interactive information sharing environment” (Sloly, 2011). The Toronto Police Service’s post-G20 Toronto revamped social media launch in 2011 reflected a new appreciation for the role that a platform like Twitter plays in preserving discipline following the events of G20 Toronto in 2010. Just as 1999 was the year that underprepared and overwhelmed police at the WTO Summit in Seattle learned that they would need to revise future approaches to policing democratic protests in their streets, 2010 was arguably the year that police on duty at the Toronto G20 Summit learned that a new approach to social media management during mega-events was required. The TPS’s renewed focus on the “information sharing environment” (Sloly, 2011) of social media echoed similar Web 2.0 police communication management styles that were emerging elsewhere in the world at around the same time, specifically in the United States.

2009 Pittsburgh G20 Summit

While police use of Twitter in relation to the 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh embodied a more passive approach of police surveillance to the platform and did not involve official gesturing on Twitter (in the form of replying to posts or following users via a registered Pennsylvania State Police Twitter account), it nonetheless was an early example of a North American police service acknowledging the connection between the sharing of information on Twitter and the maintenance of discipline.

As part of security preparations for the upcoming 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania State Police began monitoring Twitter using TweetDeck software after undercover police gathered information about planned protests at the 2009 G20 Summit at a local council meeting (State of Pennsylvania, 2009). Police monitoring of Twitter activity ultimately culminated in the FBI arresting two Americans, Elliot Madison and Michael Wallischlager, at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit in reaction to the men’s use of Twitter during the mega-event. Charges of hindering apprehension and criminal use of communication were made against the men after they helped protestors at the G20 avoid police by relaying information obtained from cell phone communication and police scanners to Twitter (Pilkington, 2009). As described in the related police warrant, “using terms and phrases associated with the G20 Summit, the Pennsylvania State Police confirmed that Madison was in fact making use of one of several Twitter accounts to provide information to
intended participants in the non-permitted September 24, 2009 march regarding law enforcement actions relative to the march” (State of Pennsylvania, 2009).

While the charges against Madison and Wallschlaeger were later dropped, their arrests serve as an example of the effect of police monitoring of the sharing of information across Twitter during mega-events. In addition, the widely publicized arrest of Madison also created a Twitter-chill for users, instilling fear that Twitter users could be arrested if they simply leveraged the platform to assist activists at future G20 gatherings. In an interview following the incident, Madison stated that his use of Twitter during the summit was “the same as if you and I were walking down the street, and I said to you, ‘Hey, the police are on 42nd street, and they’ve said anyone who goes there will be arrested, so don’t go there’” (Thrasher, 2009).

According to Madison’s lawyer, Martin Stolar, the FBI’s arrest of Madison over his G20 Pittsburgh tweets was the first time that the FBI had claimed that “the posting of information itself is the crime” (Thrasher, 2009). As Stolar later noted in a television interview, with Madison’s Twitter post of the Pittsburgh Police’s disperse order, “the communication facility then, the cell phone or the computer that was used to post that message, becomes an instrument of the crime, and the use of that mass communication facility becomes … a crime” (Kouddous, 2009).

As an aim of mega-event security forces, managing information shared on Twitter involves pre-emptive monitoring of Twitter activity before the event and may include arrests. This approach to monitoring tweets shares a “pre-emptive doctrine” (Elmer & Opel, 2008) of policing that was perfected at the 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Summit in Miami, Florida. This pre-Twitter policing model, referred to as the Miami Model, combines a heavy police presence with pre-emptive arrests and extensive surveillance of mega-event host cities (Elmer & Opel, 2008). Thanks to the proliferation of mobile technology and social media, police application of the Miami Model towards maintaining discipline has expanded to incorporate police use and monitoring of platforms like Twitter.

Although the Pennsylvania State Police did not create an official “verified” police Twitter account, post original tweets, or re-tweet in relation to the 2009 Pittsburgh G20 Summit, such police use of Twitter did occur in relation to the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit.
2010 Toronto G20 Summit

Police engagement with Twitter in relation to the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada provides useful context for understanding police use of Twitter during the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto. TweetDeck.com shows that the RCMP registered two Twitter accounts—@v2010isu (English) and @gisv2010 (French)—on March 19, 2009, prior to the 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh and well in advance of the 2010 Winter Olympics held in February of 2010. All tweets posted from these 2010 Winter Olympics Integrated Security Unit Twitter accounts followed a similar format. Every tweet included a short police statement followed by a link to another site, almost always the official V2010isu.ca and GISV2010.ca police service platforms. A typical tweet posted by the 2010 Winter Olympics ISU on January 21, 2010 simply states, “Media Advisory – Demonstration of security screening at Olympic venues http://ow.ly/12m5E” (Twitter, 2010). No replies were made via either Twitter account, no re-tweets were made, and only four Twitter accounts were followed by @v2010isu and @gisv2010. While these police accounts did officially announce the police presence on Twitter, unlike the use of Twitter by the Pittsburgh Police during the G20 Summit in 2009, the Vancouver Olympics police accounts were still used in a one-way, top-down advisory capacity, and little effort was made to use the platform to respond or to follow other Twitter accounts.

The RCMP used a similar approach to Twitter when it came to setting up a bilingual G8 Huntsville/G20 Toronto Twitter account for the 2010 G8/G20 Summits in Canada, @G8G20ISUca. While most of the 182 total tweets posted to the account simply included links to the RCMP’s official G8/G20 platform, use of the platform included following more Twitter accounts (primarily other police accounts) and posting a few replies to Twitter posts made by other users.

In contrast to the RCMP’s 2010 Vancouver Olympics and 2010 G8/G20 Summit ISU Twitter accounts, use of the Toronto Police Service’s account, @TorontoPolice, in relation to the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit provides an example of much savvier police gesturing via the microblogging platform. @TorontoPolice was registered on September 15, 2008 according to TweetDeck.com, which makes it one of the first, if not the first, official Twitter accounts registered by a police service in Canada. @TorontoPolice is also one of the more active verified police accounts with a total of 46,593 posted tweets as of June 23, 2013.

Leading up to, during, and after the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit held on June 26 and 27, the @TorontoPolice Twitter account actively posted tweets, replied to tweets, re-tweeted, and followed other Twitter users. Over the course
of four days (the day before the summit, the two days of the summit, and the day after the summit), a reported total of 335 tweets were posted to the @TorontoPolice account (T. Burrows, personal communication, July 5, 2011). The majority of posts re-tweeted by @TorontoPolice during these four days were supportive of the Toronto Police actions during the Toronto G20 Summit weekend. Such re-tweeting by @TorontoPolice both increased the volume of supportive tweets and momentarily returned buried supportive tweets back to the first page of displayed tweets, which increased the visibility of the positive tweets and their chances of being further re-tweeted.

Toronto Police use of Twitter during the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit did not simply serve to advise the public on a certain summit-related topic or event. Their tweeting also contributed to the flow of G20 policing facts, attitudes, and reactions on the platform. The Toronto Police made a considerable effort to contribute to the milieu of 2010 G20 Toronto Summit information on Twitter by replying to posts made by other Twitter users and by thanking them for the support. By replying to posts on the same platform where G20 Toronto policing discussions were occurring, the TPS was able to manage the flow of information on Twitter to a higher degree than if they simply posted a web link to an official police statement. By re-tweeting and following users, information shared on the @TorontoPolice Twitter page helped shape perspectives and actions that flowed from the mega-event.

The @TorontoPolice account has also been an active follower of other Twitter accounts, which we can read as another effort to maintain ongoing indefinite discipline. As of March 18, 2011, @TorontoPolice was following a total of 1,834 Twitter accounts, many of which were the accounts that @TorontoPolice responded to in relation to the G20 Toronto Summit. In addition to providing the Toronto Police with real-time information related to what was happening on the streets of Toronto during the G20 Summit, following Twitter accounts also allowed them to assemble a valuable profile of G20 tweeters of interest. As noted by activist and surveillance scholar Kate Milberry, anyone tweeting about the G20 was of potential interest:

I followed @TorontoPolice on Twitter myself. When I went on the page, you go up on Twitter and it says, “you and this person follow the same people.” So (@TorontoPolice) and I were following G20 people on Twitter. At the bottom of that (list) was my sister-in-law. She’s apolitical, she’s a mommy blogger. She didn’t send one tweet about the G20. So basically,

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1 As of June 23, 2013, @TorontoPolice is following 1,651 other Twitter users.
(@TorontoPolice) was on my page looking at who I followed and started following different people that I followed, to see, to gather information about what type of person I was. There’s no reason for (@TorontoPolice) to have been following my sister in-law so it showed that (they were) somehow looking into me, trying to figure out who I was. (K. Milberry, personal communication, November 27, 2010)

The TPS monitoring and use of Twitter culminated in the 2010 detention and arrest of Toronto resident and tweeter Byron Sonne. Prior to the G20 Toronto Summit, Sonne was actively sharing information online, including tweets about the security fence constructed for the summit, additional CCTV cameras that were being installed, and other information related to mounting security measures. However, Sonne’s tweets ended five days before the summit was to start after he was stopped and arrested by the Toronto Police while riding a bus in Toronto (Kennedy, 2012). As a result of his sharing of information related to the G20 Toronto security fencing and CCTV installations on various online platforms, Sonne was arrested and ultimately charged with “possessing explosive materials” and “counselling the commission of mischief not committed” (Kennedy, 2012). During Sonne’s trial, the Crown argued that his criticizing of the G20 event online was a threat to security because he also had potentially explosive chemicals stored at his Toronto home (Kennedy, 2012).

While acquitted of all charges made against him in May 2012, Sonne’s arrest by the Toronto Police before the G20 Toronto Summit netted him a total of 330 days in custody leading up to his trial and prevented him from continuing to disseminate information on Twitter during the Toronto G20 Summit. By the time the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit had actually commenced, Sonne was temporarily offline and in police custody, leaving the TPS with one less tweeter disrupting the maintenance of discipline in the city.

2011 Occupy Wall Street Protests in New York City

Apart from being the unofficial home base for the global Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protest movement of late 2011, New York City was also the site of the arrest of Twitter user Malcolm Harris. Of all of the arrests made in New York during the OWS protests, Harris’s arrest by the New York Police Department is of particular note because of the role that his own tweets played in his ongoing prosecution. In defense of his arrest for disorderly conduct (Wolford, 2012) on the Brooklyn Bridge during an OWS protest in October 2011, Harris alleged
that police led protesters onto the bridge in order to arrest them (Ax, 2012). In response to the claim, prosecutors sent a subpoena to Twitter in 2012, demanding copies of since deleted tweets posted by Harris to his Twitter account during the Brooklyn Bridge arrests. While Twitter initially refused requests to turn over Harris’s tweets, under the threat of contempt and fines by the judge overseeing the case, Twitter eventually agreed to turn over the deleted tweets on September 14, 2012 (Ax, 2012).

As noted by blogger Josh Wolford, Twitter’s turning over of Harris’s deleted tweets set a precedent for future requests from police and prosecutors for information shared via Twitter. On December 12, 2012, Harris pled guilty to the charge of disorderly conduct at the OWS protest after the court’s review of his tweets from the Brooklyn Bridge revealed that he did indeed hear the police warn that he and others would be arrested if they walked onto the bridge (Buettner, 2012).

Malcolm Harris and his lawyer Martin Stolar (the same lawyer who represented Elliot Madison arrested for his use of Twitter during the 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh) have indicated that they will not appeal Harris’s guilty sentence of six days of community service. Instead, they have stated that they will be seeking to appeal the decision to approve the subpoena issued to Twitter to obtain Harris’s deleted OWS tweets (Buettner, 2012). As noted by Stolar, it is the “legal precedent” (Buettner, 2012) established by forcing a microblogging service like Twitter to turn over a user’s tweets or otherwise face charges that poses a threat to the free sharing of information by citizens not only during mega-events but at any time.

When Twitter users’ tweets, including their deleted tweets, are not their own, an additional path opens up for police services as part of their ongoing efforts to enforce indefinite discipline. In light of Harris’s case, might the posting of future tweets or the review of archived tweets in the United States by a citizen on any topic whatsoever result in the poster potentially facing detention or even arrest? For example, if the New York Police Department had initially done a better job of monitoring and archiving the tweets Harris posted leading up to the OWS protest, a subpoena request for his tweets after the fact would not have been required because they would already have had them. Furthermore, the police would have also have had the option of pre-emptively detaining Harris in response to his tweets prior to the OWS protest, similar to the Toronto Police Service’s pre-emptive detention of Byron Sonne prior to the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit.
Conclusion

Police use of Twitter leading up to, during, and after the 2009 Pittsburgh G20 Summit, the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit, and the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City collectively position Twitter as a relatively new contested space where a police services’ “disciplinary power to observe” (Foucault, 1977, p. 224) citizens during and between mega-events exposes the “infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques” (Foucault, 1977, p. 224) that are being used to govern and discipline democracies such as Canada and the United States. Seemingly idle stretches between mega-events and their related security measures also involve disciplinary norms tied to everyday Twitter use in North America. The three case studies I’ve touched on in this article reveal how the Twitter microblogging platform is intertwined with the “moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power … always local and unstable” (Foucault, 1978, p. 92) and the ways social media platforms are becoming increasingly embedded components of the day-to-day maintenance of disciplinary and control societies.

As police services around the world extend their technologies of discipline to social media platforms, one of the lessons to be drawn from past use of Twitter in relation to mega-event protest is that an underdiscussed component of Twitter and other (micro)blogging platforms includes the freedom extended to users who opt not to contribute content to these services. That is, by refraining from sharing information related to future mega-events via Twitter, non-users avoid having to confront and defend seemingly benign and ephemeral tweets that get flagged by police services. In turn, non-users benefit from being imperceptible, a benefit that was not available to tweeters like Madison, Wallschlaeger, Sonne, or Harris.
Works Cited


