

POSTSCRIPT ON CONTROL SOCIETIES

History

Foucault associated *disciplinary societies* with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their apogee at the beginning of the twentieth century. They operate by organizing major sites of confinement. Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then school ("you're not at home, you know"), then the barracks ("you're not at school, you know"), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement. Prison provides a model for the others: thus the heroine in *Europa 51*, on seeing the workers, cries out: "I thought they were convicts . . ." Foucault has thoroughly analyzed the ideal behind sites of confinement, clearly seen in the factory: bringing everything together, giving each thing its place, organizing time, setting up in this space-time a force of production greater than the sum of component forces. But Foucault also knew how short-lived this model was: it succeeded *sovereign societies* with an altogether different aim and operation (taking a cut of production instead of organizing it, condemning to death instead of ordering life); the transition took place gradually, and Napoleon seems to have effected the overall

transformation from one kind of society into the other. But discipline would in its turn begin to break down as new forces moved slowly into place, then made rapid advances after the Second World War: we were no longer in disciplinary societies, we were leaving them behind.

We're in the midst of a general breakdown of all sites of confinement—prisons, hospitals, factories, schools, the family. The family is an "interior" that's breaking down like all other interiors—educational, professional, and so on. The appropriate ministers have constantly been announcing supposedly appropriate reforms. Educational reforms, industrial reforms, hospital, army, prison reforms; but everyone knows these institutions are in more or less terminal decline. It's simply a matter of nursing them through their death throes and keeping people busy until the new forces knocking at the door take over. *Control societies* are taking over from disciplinary societies. "Control" is the name proposed by Burroughs to characterize the new monster, and Foucault sees it fast approaching. Paul Virilio too is constantly analyzing the ultrarapid forms of apparently free-floating control that are taking over from the old disciplines at work within the time scales of closed systems. It's not a question of amazing pharmaceutical products, nuclear technology, and genetic engineering, even though these will play their part in the new process. It's not a question of asking whether the old or new system is harsher or more bearable, because there's a conflict in each between the ways they free and enslave us. With the breakdown of the hospital as a site of confinement, for instance, community psychiatry, day hospitals, and home care initially presented new freedoms, while at the same time contributing to mechanisms of control as rigorous as the harshest confinement. It's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons.

Logic

The various placements or sites of confinement through which individuals pass are independent variables: we're supposed to start all over again each time, and although all these sites have a common language, it's *analogical*. The various forms of control, on the other hand, are inseparable variations, forming a system of varying geometry whose language is *digital* (though not necessarily binary). Confinements are *molds*, different moldings, while controls are a *modulation*,

like a self-transmuting¹ molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another. This comes out well in the matter of wages: the factory was a body of men whose internal forces reached an equilibrium between the highest possible production and the lowest possible wages; but in a control society businesses take over from factories, and a business is a soul, a gas. There were of course bonus systems in factories, but businesses strive to introduce a deeper level of modulation into all wages, bringing them into a state of constant metastability punctuated by ludicrous challenges, competitions, and seminars. If the stupidest TV game shows are so successful, it's because they're a perfect reflection of the way businesses are run. Factories formed individuals into a body of men for the joint convenience of a management that could monitor each component in this mass, and trade unions that could mobilize mass resistance; but businesses are constantly introducing an inexorable rivalry presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against one another and sets itself up in each of them, dividing each within himself. Even the state education system has been looking at the principle of "getting paid for results": in fact, just as businesses are replacing factories, *school* is being replaced by *continuing education* and exams by continuous assessment.² It's the surest way of turning education into a business.

In disciplinary societies you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in control societies you never finish anything—business, training, and military service being coexisting metastable states of a single modulation, a sort of universal transmutation. Kafka, already standing at the point of transition between the two kinds of society, described in *The Trial* their most ominous judicial expressions: *apparent acquittal* (between two confinements) in disciplinary societies, and *endless postponement* in (constantly changing) control societies are two very different ways of doing things, and if our legal system is vacillating, is itself breaking down, it's because we're going from one to the other. Disciplinary societies have two poles: signatures standing for *individuals*, and numbers or places in a register standing for their position in a *mass*. Disciplines see no incompatibility at all between these two aspects, and their power both amasses and individuates, that is, it fashions those over whom it's exerted into a body of people and molds the

individuality of each member of that body (Foucault saw the origin of this twin concern in the priest's pastoral power over his flock and over each separate animal, and saw civil power subsequently establishing itself by different means as a lay "pastor"). In control societies, on the other hand, the key thing is no longer a signature or number but a code: codes are *passwords*, whereas disciplinary societies are ruled (when it comes to integration or resistance) by *precepts*.³ The digital language of control is made up of codes indicating whether access to some information should be allowed or denied. We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become "*dividuals*," and masses become samples, data, markets, or "*banks*." Money, perhaps, best expresses the difference between the two kinds of society, since discipline was always related to molded currencies containing gold as a numerical standard, whereas control is based on floating exchange rates, modulations depending on a code setting sample percentages for various currencies. If money's old moles are the animals you get in places of confinement, then control societies have their snakes.⁴ We've gone from one animal to the other, from moles to snakes, not just in the system we live under but in the way we live and in our relations with other people too. Disciplinary man produced energy in discrete amounts, while control man undulates, moving among a continuous range of different orbits. *Surfing* has taken over from all the old *sports*.

It's easy to set up a correspondence between any society and some kind of machine, which isn't to say that their machines determine different kinds of society but that they express the social forms capable of producing them and making use of them. The old sovereign societies worked with simple machines, levers, pulleys, clocks; but recent disciplinary societies were equipped with thermodynamic machines presenting the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; control societies function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active, piracy and viral contamination. This technological development is more deeply rooted in a mutation of capitalism. The mutation has been widely recognized and can be summarized as follows: nineteenth-century capitalism was concentrative, directed toward production, and proprietorial. Thus it made the factory into a site of confinement, with the capitalist owning the means of

production and perhaps owning other similarly organized sites (worker's homes, schools). As for markets, they were won either through specialization, through colonization, or through reducing the costs of production. But capitalism in its present form is no longer directed toward production, which is often transferred to remote parts of the Third World, even in the case of complex operations like textile plants, steelworks, and oil refineries. It's directed toward metaproduction. It no longer buys raw materials and no longer sells finished products: it buys finished products or assembles them from parts. What it seeks to sell is services, and what it seeks to buy, activities. It's a capitalism no longer directed toward production but toward products, that is, toward sales or markets. Thus it's essentially dispersive, with factories giving way to businesses. Family, school, army, and factory are no longer so many analogous but different sites converging in an owner, whether the state or some private power, but transmutable or transformable coded configurations of a single business where the only people left are administrators. Even art has moved away from closed sites and into the open circuits of banking. Markets are won by taking control rather than by establishing a discipline, by fixing rates rather than by reducing costs, by transforming products rather than by specializing production. Corruption here takes on a new power. The sales department becomes a business center or "soul." We're told businesses have souls, which is surely the most terrifying news in the world. Marketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the arrogant breed who are our masters. Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite, and discontinuous. A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt. One thing, it's true, hasn't changed—capitalism still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts and too numerous to be confined: control will have to deal not only with vanishing frontiers, but with mushrooming shantytowns and ghettos.

Program

We don't have to stray into science fiction to find a control mechanism that can fix the position of any element at any given moment—an animal in a game reserve, a man in a business (electronic tagging). Félix Guattari has imagined a town where anyone can leave their flat,

their street, their neighborhood, using their (dividual) electronic card that opens this or that barrier; but the card may also be rejected on a particular day, or between certain times of day; it doesn't depend on the barrier but on the computer that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation.

We ought to establish the basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms as their age dawns, and describe in these terms what is already taking the place of the disciplinary sites of confinement that everyone says are breaking down. It may be that older means of control, borrowed from the old sovereign societies, will come back into play, adapted as necessary. The key thing is that we're at the beginning of something new. In the *prison system*: the attempt to find "alternatives" to custody, at least for minor offenses, and the use of electronic tagging to force offenders to stay at home between certain hours. In the *school system*: forms of continuous assessment, the impact of continuing education on schools, and the related move away from any research in universities, "business" being brought into education at every level. In the *hospital system*: the new medicine "without doctors or patients" that identifies potential cases and subjects at risk and is nothing to do with any progress toward individualizing treatment, which is how it's presented, but is the substitution for individual or numbered bodies of coded "dividual" matter to be controlled. In the *business system*: new ways of manipulating money, products, and men, no longer channeled through the old factory system. This is a fairly limited range of examples, but enough to convey what it means to talk of institutions breaking down: the widespread progressive introduction of a new system of domination. One of the most important questions is whether trade unions still have any role: linked throughout their history to the struggle against disciplines, in sites of confinement, can they adapt, or will they give way to new forms of resistance against control societies? Can one already glimpse the outlines of these future forms of resistance, capable of standing up to marketing's blandishments? Many young people have a strange craving to be "motivated," they're always asking for special courses and continuing education; it's their job to discover whose ends these serve, just as older people discovered, with considerable difficulty, who was benefiting from disciplines. A snake's coils are even more intricate than a mole's burrow.