Control and Freedom

Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics

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analyzing everything. Even the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) admits this impossibility, which is why its intercept equipment automatically stores encrypted packets. The enormous, ever-increasing amount of unanalyzed data belies the computer's analytic promise and demarcates the constitutive boundaries of an "information society." Furthermore, this myth contradicts people's everyday experiences with computers by concealing the ephemerality of information (computer memory is an oxymoron), and the importance of software and local conditions. Computers crash on a regular basis, portable storage devices become unreadable, and e-mail messages disappear into the netherworld of the global network, and yet many people honestly believe in a worldwide surveillance network in which no piece of data is ever lost.

These paranoid narratives of total surveillance and total freedom are the poles of control-freedom, and are symptomatic of a larger shift in power relations from the rubric of discipline and liberty to that of control and freedom.

Control and Freedom

Gilles Deleuze has most influentially described control societies in his "Postscript on Control Societies," in which he argues that we are moving from disciplinary societies, as outlined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, to control societies. According to Foucault, disciplinary societies emerged in the eighteenth century in response to the rise of capitalism and the attendant need for useful bodies. The disciplines offered a finer resolution than sovereign power at a lower cost: the disciplines made power productive, continuous, and cost-effective by moving the emphasis from the body of the king to those "irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations."[6] Discplinary power differed from sovereign power absolutely: sovereign power was based on the physical existence of the sovereign, who exercised his power spectacularly, if discontinuously. His was a power to inflict death. Disciplinary power operated through visible yet unverifiable apparatuses of power that sought to fabricate individuals through isolation

6.   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sharing (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 208.

and constant examination—it was a power over life. Describing the measures taken in response to the plague, Foucault argues, "the enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and the periphery … all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism."[7]

The Panopticon encapsulated the disciplinary mechanism for Foucault. Proposed by Jeremy Bentham as a humane and cost-effective solution to dark, festering prisons, unsanitary hospitals, and inefficient schools and workhouses, the Panopticon comprised a central guard tower and a shorter outer annular structure (with windows on the outer circumference and iron gating on the inner) in which the prisoners/workers/patients were individually housed. In the Panopticon, visibility was a trap—the inhabitants could always be viewed by the central tower, but since the windows of the central tower were to be covered by blinds (except during chapel service), they could never be certain when they were being watched. The major effect of the Panopticon was to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[8] To work, power had to be visible, yet unverifiable. Panoptic discipline worked by causing the inmate/worker/student to recreate his or her world, to internalize the light and become light, within an enclosed space.[9] A bourgeois society formally committed to "liberty,

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7.   Ibid., 197.

8.   Ibid., 201.

9.   Not accidentally, this process of re-creation parallels the process of paranoid recovery. As, to cite Sigmund Freud, "the paranoiac builds [the world] again, not more splendid, it is true, but at least so that he can once more live in it," the inmate/student/worker is called to rebuild their own interior world. If the paranoiac "builds [their world] up by the work of [their] delusion," the inmate/student/worker rebuilds their world by the work of the delusion of constant surveillance. As with the paranoiac, *the delusion-formation, which we take to be a pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction*" (Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia [Dementia Paranoides])," in *Three Case Histories* ([New York: Collier Books, 1963], 147). Rehabilitation becomes paranoid reconstruction.

equality, fraternity" thus needed the disciplines, for as Foucault asserts, the disciplines serve as a sort of "counter-law," introducing asymmetries and excluding reciprocities in a facially equal system. Creating a "private link" between people, the disciplines bring about the nonreversible subordination of one group of people by another, so that "surplus" power is always fixed on the same side.[10]

Deleuze maintains that the confinement and the mass individuation symptomatic of disciplinary societies is now yielding to flexibility and codes—that is, control. Control society is not necessarily better or worse than disciplinary society; rather, it introduces new liberating and enslaving forces. Whereas disciplinary society relied on independent variables or molds, control society thrives on inseparable variations and modulations: factories have given way to businesses with "souls" focused on metaproduction and on destroying unions through inexorable rivalry; schools have given way to continuing education and constant assessment; new prison techniques simultaneously offer greater freedom of movement and more precise tracking; and the "new medicine 'without doctors and

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10.   For Foucault, power is not something that one possesses, nor is it a force that simply represses. Rather, as he argues in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978):

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in various social hegemonies ... it is the moving substrate of force relations which by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. (92–93).

Power is not something that exists abstractly, but only exists in its application; also, where there is power, there is resistance. Importantly, as he argues in "Two Lectures" (in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon [New York, Pantheon Books, 1980, 78–108]) the fact that power exists in and creates a net-like structure in which everybody acts does not mean "power is the best distributed thing in the world, although in some sense that is so. We are not dealing with a sort of democratic or anarchic distribution of power through bodies" (99).

patients' identifies potential cases and subjects at risk" without attempting treatment. According to Deleuze, these all "form a system of varying geometry whose language is *digital* (though not necessarily binary)."[11] The computer, with its emphasis on information and its reduction of the individual to the password, epitomizes control societies. Digital language makes control systems invisible: we no longer experience the visible yet unverifiable gaze but a network of nonvisualizable digital control.

Deleuze's reading of control societies is persuasive, although arguably paranoid, because it accepts propaganda as technological reality, and conflates possibility with probability. Just as panopticism overestimated the power of publicity, so too does control-freedom overestimate the power of control systems.[12] This is not to say that Deleuze's analysis is not correct but rather that it—like so many other analyses of technology— unintentionally fulfills the aims of control by imaginatively ascribing to control power that it does not yet have and by erasing its failures. Thus, in order to understand control-freedom, we need to insist on the failures and the actual operations of technology. We also need to understand the difference between freedom and liberty since control, though important, is only half of the story.

Although used interchangeably, freedom and liberty have significantly different etymologies and histories. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Old English *frei* (derived from Sanskrit) meant dear and described all those close or related to the head of the family (hence friends). Conversely in Latin, *libertas* denoted the legal state of being free versus enslaved and was later extended to children (*liberi*), meaning literally the free members of the household. Those who are one's friends are free; those who are not are slaves. But, like love, freedom exceeds the subject. Liberty is linked to human subjectivity; freedom is not. The Declaration of Independence, for example, describes men as having liberty and

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11.   Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, eds. Thomas Y. Levin et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 320–321, 318.

12.   For more on Jeremy Bentham's overestimation of publicity, see Foucault's discussion of the importance of media in "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, 146–165.

the nation as being free. Free will—"the quality of being free from the control of fate or necessity"—may first have been attributed to human will, but Newtonian physics attributes freedom—degrees of freedom, free bodies—to objects.

Freedom differs from liberty as control differs from discipline. Liberty, like discipline, is linked to institutions and political parties, whether liberal or libertarian; freedom is not. Although freedom can work for or against institutions, it is not bound to them—it travels through unofficial networks. To have liberty is to be liberated from something; to be free is to be self-determining, autonomous. Freedom can or cannot exist within a state of liberty: one can be liberated yet "unfree," or "free" yet enslaved (Orlando Patterson has argued in *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* that freedom arose from the yearnings of slaves). Freedom implies—or perhaps has become reduced to—freedom of movement: you drive on a freeway, not a libertyway. Free love and free speech move from location to location, person to person. Hackers declare that information, which is technically a measure of the degree of freedom within a system, should be free. Freedom, in its current distinction from liberty, responds to liberty's inadequacies. Freedom, as freedom of movement, cannot easily endorse segregation—there can be no equal but separate. The "freedom rides" of the civil rights movement responded to emancipation's inadequacies. Crucially, this difference between freedom and liberty makes sense mainly in Anglo languages. U.S. politics, from segregation to late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century U.S. global power, arguably generates the pronounced distinction between the two.

In an odd extension of commodity fetishism, we now wish to be as free as our commodities: by freeing markets, we free ourselves.[13] And

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13.   According to Karl Marx, "The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists ... in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.... [I]t is nothing but the definite social relation between men which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (*Capital*, vol. 1 trans. Ben Fowkes, [New York: Penguin Books with New Left Review, 1976], 164–166). The commodity now seems to be endowed with *freedom*, operating in a free marketplace: now the desire is to emulate such a commodity.

this freedom is supposed to resonate with all the greatness of prior libera-
tions. If once "white man's burden," it is now "enduring freedom"; if
once "liberty, equality, and fraternity," now "freedom, democracy, free
enterprise." George W. Bush's new tripartite motto hijacks the civil rights
movement, erases equality and fraternity, and makes ambiguous the sub-
ject of freedom. Bush asserts that "the concept of 'free trade' arose as a
moral principle even before it became a pillar of economics. If you can
make something that others value, you should be able to sell it to them.
If others make something that you value, you should be able to buy it.
This is real freedom, the freedom for a person—or a nation—to make a
living."[14] His statement unashamedly and uncannily resonates with Karl
Marx's condemnation of bourgeois freedom: "In a bourgeois society capi-
tal is independent and has individuality, while the living person is depen-
dent and has no individuality. . . . By freedom is meant, under the present
bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying."[15]
Freedom as stemming from a commodity's "natural" qualities reflects cap-
italism's naturalization and the new (rhetoric of) transparency.

Sexuality in the Age of Fiber Optics

As the rest of this book elaborates, the relationship between control and
freedom in terms of fiber-optic networks is often experienced as sexuality
or is mapped in terms of sexuality-paranoia.

The insight that power can be experienced as sexuality is indebted to
the work of Foucault and the psychotic Daniel Paul Schreber (and Eric
Santner's interpretation of his memoirs). Foucault, in the first volume of
his uncompleted *History of Sexuality*, contends that sexuality is "the secret"
instrumental to power/knowledge. Since modernity, we have constantly
confessed the truth of sex: from seventeenth-century Catholic confes-
sions that demanded more and more technical details to 1960s' declara-
tions of sexual freedom and revolt; from psychoanalysis to institutional

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14.   Office of the White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of
America*, ⟨http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html⟩ (accessed October 1, 2003).

15.   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (Peking: Foreign
Languages Press, 1975), 52.