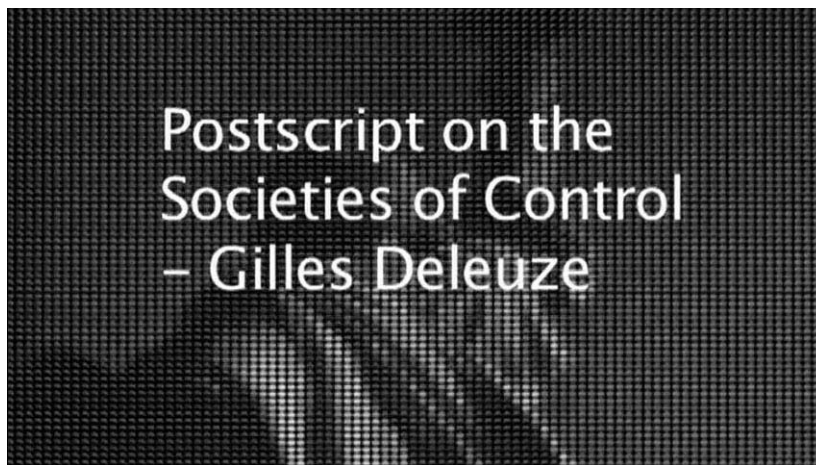


DELEUZE'S 'POSTSCRIPT ON THE SOCIETIES OF CONTROL'

Gary Hall, Clare Birchall, Peter Woodbridge



To watch the second episode of Liquid Theory TV: *Deleuze's 'Postscript on the Societies of Control'*, click on the image above, or cut and paste this link into your Internet browser: http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=GIus7lm_ZK0

Liquid Theory TV is a collaboration between Clare Birchall, Gary Hall and Peter Woodbridge designed to develop a series of IPTV programmes. (IPTV, in its broadest sense, refers to all those technologies which use computer networks to deliver audio-visual programming.) The idea behind the Liquid Theory TV project is to experiment with IPTV's potential for providing new ways of communicating 'intellectual' ideas, easily and cheaply, both inside and outside of the university. We want to do so not so much to *have an impact* outside of the academy, be it economic, social or cultural; nor to connect with an increasingly media-literate audience that books supposedly cannot, or can no longer, reach. Rather, we are experimenting with IPTV in order to explore the potential that different forms of communication have to do different things – to the point of perhaps even leading us to conceive of what we *do* as

academics, writers, artists, media theorists and philosophers differently (see Wise, 2006: 242).

The second episode in the series takes as its focus Gilles Deleuze's short essay, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control'.¹ While this episode is being made available for the first time in an issue of *Culture Machine* which has as its theme creative media; and while Liquid Theory TV could indeed be described as a creative project concerned, to an extent, with producing alternative, rival, or counter-desires to those currently dominant within much of society (at its simplest, a desire for philosophy or – more broadly – theory, rather than for the media creations of Richard Branson, Simon Cowell or Rupert Murdoch, say), this does not mean that either the series or this particular episode should be regarded simply as an attempt to *creatively perform* Deleuze's philosophy. The critical and interpretive aspects of scholarly work remain important to us here, even if they are being undertaken in a medium very different to the traditional academic journal article or book.

Significantly, many of those writing under the influence of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have interpreted desire somewhat crudely – as an inherently positive, primal propulsive force that opposes domination and control. Within the realms of critical and cultural theory, in particular, this has indeed led to a marked shift in emphasis and attention: away from a concern with representation and critical interpretation, and toward the generation of creative proliferations of desire. Our reading of Deleuze and Guattari, however, would be closer to that of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi when, in *The Soul at Work*, he argues that desire should be conceived more as a field than as a force. 'It is the field where an intense struggle takes place, or better an entangled network of different and conflicting forces', Bifo writes. 'Desire is not a good boy, nor the positive force of history. Desire is the psychological field where imaginary flows, ideologies and economic interests are constantly clashing' (Bifo, 2009: 118).

This understanding of desire as a field rather than as simply a force is extremely important. It means that not all forms of desire can be regarded as being psychologically or politically progressive. Nor do all instances of desire necessarily oppose domination. Some instances of the desiring field can be neo-liberal, totalitarian, even fascist.² Bifo makes a related point with regard to the use of the concept of the multitude by Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and others in the last decade or so. 'They speak of the multitude as if it

were a boundless positive energy, a force of liberty that cannot submit to domination in any way' (2009: 154-55). Bifo, however, proceeds to cite Jean Baudrillard from *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* to show that, far from being inherently politically subversive, the multitude also has another, constitutively passive side to it:

It has always been thought – this is the very ideology of the mass media – that it is the media which envelop the masses. The secret of manipulation has been sought in a frantic semiology of the mass media. But it has been overlooked, in this naive logic of communication, that *the masses are a stronger medium than all the media*, that it is the former who envelop and absorb the latter – or at least there is no priority of one over the other. The mass and the media are one single process. Mass(age) is the message. (Baudrillard, 1983:44; cited in Berardi, 2009: 155)³

While we would largely agree with Bifo in this respect, at least one important question remains to be addressed. It is a question that Bifo raises but which he himself does not proceed to answer in *The Soul at Work*: namely, that while desire may judge history, 'who judges desire?' (2009: 118). What if not every desire *does* oppose domination, with some desires actually being a function of the ideology of late capitalist society and its modes of production? What if some ideas of desire, liquidity and flow in fact serve to replicate the forces and values of market capitalism and the societies of control, as both Baudrillard and Bifo maintain?⁴ How do we *judge* which creative proliferations of desire are politically just and progressive, and thus capable of producing deterritorializing 'unblockages', psychologically and socially? Who *decides* which desires oppose domination and offer escape plans from already mapped out existential and philosophical paths, and which do not? On what basis, on what grounds, can such judgements be made?

We must confess to a certain fascination with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and with the creative energy it has generated in fields as diverse as art, architecture, design, film, music and dance. Yet for all that we must also admit to being uncertain as to what extent, and with quite what degree of rigour, the question of judgement and the decision has been addressed within what we, as a

form of shorthand, might refer to as 'Deleuzianism', and what Bifo refers to as the "desiring movement" or 'desiring theory'(2009: 117, 154).

It is certainly possible to provide a reading of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari that offers a means of thinking about this question. The following passage from Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical* is just one of the possible starting points for doing so:

The mind begins by coldly and curiously regarding what the body does, it is first of all a witness; then it is affected, it becomes an impassioned witness, that is, it experiences for itself affects that are not simply effects of the body, but veritable *critical entities* that hover over the body and judge it. (Deleuze, 1997: 124)

Still, other issues and concerns appear to have taken precedence, certainly when it comes to much of the way in which Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy has been taken up and adopted within academia today.

It is perhaps fair to say that the question of judgment and decision has been a more prominent feature of that current of thought associated more closely with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. To what extent, then, can Derrida's account of the undecidable nature of the decision help us to rigorously think through and understand how to make a responsible political judgement as to what particular actions to take, what readings or writings to produce, what creative proliferations of desire to follow?

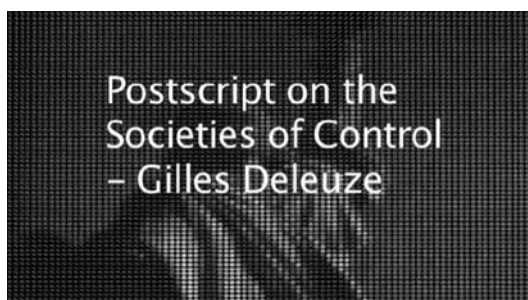
To be sure, what Derrida teaches us about the relation between politics and undecidability is that the decision as to whether a specific instance of media activism or creative proliferation of desire is politically just and responsible *cannot* remain entirely open and incalculable. If it is not to be subject to the specific demands of the particular concrete situation in which it is to be made, any decision regarding politics cannot be taken from scratch. Instead, it has to be based on rationally calculated and reflected upon – in however compromised and limited a fashion – *universal* values of infinite justice and responsibility.

At the same time, any such decision cannot be made solely on the basis of knowledge and values that have been extensively thought

about and decided upon *a priori*, such as a preconceived political agenda or theory (and that would include any preconceived position derived from Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis). To make a responsible political decision it is necessary to respect *both* poles of the non-oppositional relation between the calculable and the incalculable, the knowable and the unknowable, the decidable and the undecidable; but then to make a leap of faith.

Can such a leap of faith in the face of a 'certain non-knowledge' which leaves us 'disarmed', but to which we feel 'freely obligated and bound to respond' (Derrida, 2001b: 53-54),⁵ perhaps serve as another name for what this issue of *Culture Machine* describes as a creative process that also remains critical? This is just one of the questions this second episode of Liquid Theory TV, *Deleuze's 'Postscript on the Societies of Control'*, endeavours to explore.

To watch *Deleuze's 'Postscript on the Societies of Control'*, click on the image below:



Notes

¹ The first episode appeared in *Culture Machine* 10 in 2009.

² Bifo writes:

Ever since the corporations specializing in 'imagineering' (Walt Disney, Murdoch, Mediaser, Microsoft, Glaxo) took control of the desiring field, violence and ignorance have been unleashed, digging the immaterial trenches of techno-slavery and mass conformism. These forces have colonized the field of desire. This is why the new cultural movements, like media-

activism, emphasize the need of effective action in the constitution of the desiring field. (2009: 118)

³ Similarly, Bifo points out that, while the US for Deleuze and Guattari is a country of 'infinite energy, producing schizoid signs, endlessly reactivated', it is a desert of the real as far as Baudrillard is concerned. Also, while Guattari's schizoanalysis associates schizophrenia with a creative proliferation of desire which can 'endlessly erode all structures of control', schizophrenia is connected to terror for Baudrillard (Bifo, 2009: 150, 160).

⁴ For Baudrillard,

This compulsion towards liquidity, flow, and an accelerated situation of what is psychic, sexual, or pertaining to the body is the exact replica of the force which rules market value: capital must circulate; gravity and any fixed point must disappear; the chain of investments and reinvestments must never stop; value must radiate endlessly and in every direction. It is the form itself which the current realization of value takes. It is the form of capital, and sexuality as a catchword and a *model* is the way it appears at the level of bodies. (1987: 25; cited in Bifo, 2009: 154)

⁵ For a more thorough explanation of this notion of decision, see also Derrida (2001a: 61; 2001b: 53-54).

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