Deleuze’s Society of Control

Drawing on Foucault’s ‘Discipline and Punish’, Deleuze argues that our environment has shifted from disciplinary societies to ‘societies of control’ (Deleuze, 1992). He states that we are living in a generalized crisis where spaces of enclosure mould people into data ‘dividuals’.

“In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a password, while on the other hand disciplinary societies are regulated by watchwords (as much as from the point of view of integration as from that of resistance). The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become “dividuals,” and masses, samples, data, markets, or “banks.” […] The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network.” (Deleuze, 1992: 6)

As the quote illustrates, Deleuze tries to understand individuals and their behaviour. Not only in ‘Society of Control’ but also in ‘Capitalism and Schizophrenia’, Deleuze seeks to connect politics and economy to problems of environmental control and ecological change. He understands individuals and their moralities as products of the organization of control; individuals are continuously and limitlessly controlled by systems of domination.

Deleuze’s eclectic ontology reinterprets works of other philosophers (such as Kant, Nietzsche, Foucault and Marx) and artists (for example Proust and Kafka) to describe his vision on our contemporary society. Even though his work might be influenced by the ethical naturalism of Spinoza and Nietzsche, this article mainly focuses on normative ethics. Instead of seeking to understand the nature of ethical properties, Deleuze centres his attention on practical issues. In ‘Society of Control’ Deleuze evaluates the following question: What should we do with these societies of control? While two third of his functional inquiry describes what a society of control does and how it works, it however fails to thoroughly investigate how we should respond to this phenomenon. Deleuze states:
“There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.”

(Deleuze, 1992: 5)

According to Deleuze these ‘new weapons’ are created within political institutions, and would help us understand how control mechanisms work and create new forms of resistance. Yet, he doesn’t describe how we could create new forms of resistance. What striked me was how he formulated the sentence mentioned above. Firstly, Deleuze suggests that we shouldn’t have feelings concerning this phenomenon, because we cannot know in advance what the social consequences of these surpressed societies are. Then he goes on by stating that we should create weapons in order to overturn the crisis of alienated dividuals, so we can bring fluxivity and changing realities and identities into existence. To my opinion, there seems to be a paradox in his reasoning; the paradox of (non)judgement. Deleuze states that we should not judge the situation and draw conclusions, but ‘automatically’ challenge judgements of a situation. Deleuze’s words ‘crisis’ and ‘weapons’, however, denote a critical state of affairs. Krinein is the Greek antecedents of the word ‘crisis’, and literally means to separate, decide or judge (etymonline.com). His choice of words insinuates that Deleuze does seem to have an opinion about what we’re supposed to do with the society of control; and that is to defend ourselves with weapons.

Even though Deleuze argues for a heterodox understanding of our political ecology, his paradoxal use of words and his obscure description of ‘weapons of resistance’, however, make this heterodoxy rather difficult.

**Bibliography:**

- Deleuze, G. "Societies of Control," October, 59, 1992, pp. 3-7