

Control Culture

Foucault and Deleuze after Discipline

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Post-Mortem on Race and Control

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Control names a dynamic mode of power which seeks to proliferate difference in order to modulate and contain its disruptive force. Thus, one starting point for a critique of control is to think with and through its dependency on difference, including difference marked as racial. From this premise, it is possible to pursue how racial assemblages constitute the ideological grounds for accounts of control, and explore why control might become an increasingly salient metaphor for racial power as the political centrality of race intensifies with the global rise of ethnonationalism and outright fascism. Although thinking of race as a matter of technical control of bodies involves working through posthumanist and new-materialist methods for social analysis, it also involves retrospectively interpreting the role of racial difference in the constitution of control theory's paranoid figuration of technology and the state. In the works of William Burroughs and Gilles Deleuze, control exhibits a desire for the destruction of subjectivity through constant modulations of difference and the integration of individuals into networked aspirations of capitalist accumulation. This rhetoric on the technological penetration of the body by the state, I will argue, reflects a generalisation of existing forms of race war into the Cold War state form, allowing for control theory to appear deracinated and globalised. Nonetheless, the critique of control demonstrates the importance of the concept for grappling with deterritorialised models of empire, in which race is affectively modulated across media environments, biotechnologies and war apparatuses. From this vantage point, the engagement of race and control charts a different path for critical race theory than do the largely polemical critiques by some Deleuzeans of the structuralism and representationalism of racial formation theory. The intersection of race and control poses questions of whether and how contemporary forms of empire are able to take hold of race's plastic potential for differentiation.

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The horror of control emerges not in the active attempt of a commanding operator to overcome resistance, but in the dream of a total realisation of the operator's control. At that point control itself vanishes. In William Burroughs' 1978 essay 'The Limits of Control', the capability of the state to exercise control over a population is presented as inherently limited by the agency of subjects who potentially resist the control order. However, the imagined realisation of control also marks control's vanishing point, as the transformation of a responding subject into an object of domination also marks its release from a dynamic of control into one of mere use:

Control also needs opposition or acquiescence; otherwise it ceases to be control . . . I control a slave, a dog, a worker; but if I establish complete control somehow, as by implanting electrodes in the brain, then my subject is little more than a tape recorder, a camera, a robot. You don't control a tape recorder – you use it . . . All control systems try to make control as tight as possible, but at the same time, if they succeeded completely, there would be nothing left to control. Suppose for example a control system installed electrodes in the brains of all prospective workers at birth. Control is now complete. Even the thought of rebellion is neurologically impossible. No police force is necessary. No psychological control is necessary, other than pushing buttons. (Burroughs 1978: 38)

Control thus names a dynamic mode of power that is not dependent on a specific structure of production and labour. If the slave, the dog or generic 'worker' are the more-than-human labouring figures of this potential difference that defines control, it is the coloniser who provides the figure for the disruption of control's totalisation and, simultaneously, its total dissolution. Positing that the precolonial Mayan calendar schematised the total control of the population even as its use atrophied without existential enemies, total control meant that the Mayans could not 'repel invaders': 'such a hermetic control system could be completely disoriented and shattered by even one person who tampered with the control calendar [sic] on which the control system depended more and more heavily as the actual means of force withered away' (Burroughs 1978: 39). If colonialism may disrupt this process of turning animal life into machine life, reinforcing a narrative of the vanishing Indian coincident with US settler-imperial nationalisms (Byrd 2011), it also massifies as a political desire for control. Turning to the ascendance of empires and the problem of their inability to cope with change, Burroughs thus concludes that control's ultimate dependence is not on labour nor technology but on

time itself. Once a control system totalises, it is only a matter of time before contradictions rend it apart. Moving from the enforced control of the slave or the dog to the totalised control of the indigene, empire models control on ever-massified scales only to inevitably dissolve in the face of aleatory complexity.

Yale cyberneticist José Manuel Rodríguez Delgado's infamous experimental use of brain electrodes to pacify a bull was the ostensible occasion for Burroughs' essay. Yet the Cold War expansion of the US security state – from the CIA's experiments in torture to produce 'learned helplessness' to the expansion of FBI surveillance – formed its public context. With the report of the Church Committee and the public revelation of the COINTELPRO programme in 1971, decades of state spying on black Communist and black Muslim activists was the justification for the creation of the mass surveillance apparatus that forms the backdrop of Burroughs' paranoid literary oeuvre. Given the long rise of US policing techniques in the contexts of Indian war, slave patrols and renditions, and Asian counterinsurgency from the Philippines occupation through those of Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq (Singh 2017), the entanglement of militarised anti-Communism, anti-blackness and Islamophobia in the history of US technological surveillance and mind control programmes are severed from accounts of control's novelty (Guenther 2013). If these disavowals of colonisation and anti-black racism form the discursive context of control theory, Burroughs and the Beat writers are more likely to displace the central axes of US race war in order to figure control through a mediation between primitivism and futurism which allows for control's relation to the state to be generalised across the social field. Timothy Yu claims that rather than focusing on the black/white axis of racial power during the civil rights era along the lines of prominent essayists like Norman Mailer, Burroughs fashioned a techno-orientalism that made the global city a site of both fantasy and danger in his literary oeuvre. In the process, the orient becomes the site for fashioning a speculative vision of advanced capitalist control (Yu 2008). Although the spectre of the orient is not explicit in 'The Limits of Control', Burroughs' rendering of control as the postcolonial future of capitalist security is complemented by a primitivism in which the figure of the Mayan native provides a millenarian vision of social totality and its dissolution. Despite this displacement of race as an organising dimension of imperial surveillance and militarisation, the figures of the slave and the native in the essay suggest that control might be configured as a technology for managing dissent against a racial order, even as the control regime seeks to modulate and dissipate the identities that allow that order to function.

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In Gilles Deleuze's reflections on the topic, race plays no explicit role in the arsenal of control. However, as with Burroughs, the theory of control is implicitly racialised; its critiques of digital communication and plastic subjec-

tivity rely on specific understandings of how race spatialises the globe under capitalism. For Deleuze, control marks a transition from a disciplinary society reliant on schools, prisons and other institutions towards an informational society permeated by market logics that smooth speech, imagination and conduct into capitalist prerogatives. Deleuze thinks control from the vanishing point identified by Burroughs: there is simply no free subjectivity from which to resist the regime of control, only the integration of the brain into a kind of mass nervous system. For Deleuze, the brain is not the site of a deep internal subject but rather a folding of the environment into an event:

The brain's precisely this boundary of a continuous two-way movement between an Inside and an Outside, this membrane between them. New cerebral pathways, new ways of thinking, aren't explicable in terms of microsurgery; it's for science, rather, to try and discover what might have happened in the brain for one to start thinking this way or that. I think that subjectivation, events, and brains are more or less the same thing. (Negri and Deleuze 1995: 176)

Control constantly communicates, constantly modulates response: 'Controls are a modulation, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another' (Deleuze 1995: 179). Control dissipates the power of difference by proliferating and modulating it, displacing and postponing identity.

Distinct in emphasis from the affirmation of becoming evident in Deleuze's co-authored works with Guattari, control suggests the seamless evacuation of political resistance brought about by the technical integration of the brain into capitalist systems of circulation. While control entails specific associations with cybernetics, debt and media, the concept of control is not reducible to a single historical referent. Control's normative association with the rise of modern computing and digital media is complicated by Deleuze's references to early twentieth-century histories evident, for example, in his reference to Kafka's writings as illuminating the juridical logic of control. The most detailed book-length study of control to date locates origins of the cultural logic of digitality in the nineteenth century, with the rise of computerised forms of processing and the early theoretical underpinnings of cybernetics (Franklin 2015).

Regardless of how one conceptualises the history of control, Deleuze does geopolitically bracket control and locate it within certain logics of post-industrial capitalism. The implicitly racialised grounding for the theory of control is the international division of labour. Deleuze writes:

Capitalism is no longer directed towards production, which is often transferred to remote parts of the Third World . . . What it seeks to sell

is services, and what it seeks to buy, activities . . . Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded . . . 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. (Deleuze 1995: 181)

There is an ambivalence in this diagnosis, which at first seems to radically separate the Third World from control (as the site of both production and captivity) but then smuggles the intensification of Third World violence into control's logic: it 'will have to deal' with massified confinements of shanty towns and ghettos. Deleuze's comment that the Third World 'hasn't changed' suggests that control involves superseding earlier forms of power based on sovereignty and discipline, even if its integration of subjects as 'dividuals' within a cybernetic system may be guided by the modes in which it manages those with which it disposes on the other side of the international divide.

Such a schema fits uneasily into a contemporary geopolitical scene in which US empire has transitioned in form through its economic dependencies on Asian capital, and where the evisceration of the social state unites logics of control and disposability. The right-wing assault on redistributive and welfare policies across continents energises fascistic policing and surveillance schemes that network precisely because their ethnonationalist forms delimit them spatially – the regimes in the US, Israel, Turkey, Russia, India and the Philippines can complement one another in racially targeted social wars precisely because such wars depend on the *form* of the state use of violence rather than its content (the specific social groups that are securitised or expunged). If the political-economic dynamics which generate this form of state violence lie in debt-driven US military and security spending fuelled by Gulf oil extraction and East Asian production, then China, India and the Southeast Asian 'Tiger' economies function less as simple sites of disposable manufacturing labour than as spatial locations in which differential legal regimes allow for war accumulation. The multiplication of exceptions in the intra- and interstate form of Asian neoliberal production allows for post-industrial capital to develop a graded juridical form that is both extensively profitable and institutionally opaque (Ong 2006). From this vantage point, it is difficult to locate control's geographic logic or racial form in binary distinctions separating first from third worlds, manufacturing from service labour, white from dark continents, despite the fact that systemically empire intensifies policing of racial difference. The networking of Islamophobic ethnonationalisms overlaps with processes that are not in advance fully epidermalised, such as religious conversion, the development of group identities through warfare, the digital

mediatisation of executions, protests and police/military violence, and the slow violence of economic blockade and ecological warfare. The schema of an international division of labour captures an important part of these processes, but not the dimensions of scale and ecology that render them deep in the planetary matter.

Deleuze's adaptation of Foucault's historical schema for sovereignty, discipline and security (the analogue to control) provides another point of difficulty, as the scholars of race and colonialism have for decades contested the assertion that incarceration, torture and other forms of direct state violence have dissipated with the rise of modern logics of capital and statecraft. However, Deleuze does not make a simple claim that sovereign power is on the decline, but he does emphasise that confinement is not a primary site for the exercise of control: 'we're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication'. The 'breaking down' of the prison and other institutions lumped together with them by Foucault and Deleuze (schools and hospitals, for example) coincides with a withering of the possibility of ideology and civic discourse as sites of resistance. If resistance is possible after control, claims Deleuze, 'it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted . . . The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control' (Negri and Deleuze 1995: 174). For Deleuze, this does not mean that prisons simply disappear, but that they are remade by a different apparatus of power. Jared Sexton concurs with this vision of the foreclosure of resistant minoritised speech even as he suggests that sovereign violence (incarceration, gratuitous police violence) represent the basic form of power, with discipline and control layered on top. Critiquing the construction and cultivation of a black electorate in the US during the Obama presidency and the development of the terrorism prison system, Sexton frames the control logic as epiphenomenal to the primary and long-standing violence of policing and prisons, permanent exceptions to the liberal order: 'organized, systemic racial violence against blacks, gratuitous violence that traverses the conceptual distinction between state and civil society is . . . the opening gesture of western modernity as such' (Sexton 2007: 198).

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Despite their different characterisations of sovereignty, the fact that Sexton's afro-pessimist dismissal of black resistance echoes Deleuze's rendering of minority voicelessness points to the novel ways in which theories of control might appeal to particular strands of critical race theory. To date, the largely polemical criticisms against racial formation theory (Omi and Winant 1986) by theorists engaged with Deleuze and Guattari has often pitted ontology

against epistemology, affect against ideology, becoming against dialectics, making Deleuzian writing on race incompatible with the trends towards racial exceptionalism and diagnoses of historically durable racial structure evident in some afro-pessimist and decolonial theories. Because these extant polemics highlight Deleuze's philosophical affirmation of becoming, their emphasis on the creative potential of race sits in tension with control's paranoid evisceration of resistance. In the introduction to the volume *Deleuze and Race*, Arun Saldanha argues for an immanent philosophy of race, one defined against representationalist and structuralist social critique in its insistence that 'like all power relations, racism operates first of all through the materialities of desire and landscape far "below" any mental or linguistic detectability' (2013: 34; see further Rai 2012). So, unlike the majority of studies in the field, which centre on historical narratives about racial discourse, images and statecraft, Deleuzian approaches to race have thus far been more intimately concerned with the micropolitics of embodiment, technology and affect, connecting with feminist and queer theories that undermine the holism of the body. The agenda of such a critical programme which understands race as a material assemblage is not to act as a supplement to structuralist analysis of race but to reformulate an understanding of racial ontology in ways that require a radical rethinking of the scales, bodies and affective forms that constitute the matter of race. For Saldanha, race exhibits a certain viscosity, and in its proliferation rather than its suppression lies the possibility for a new antiracism (Saldanha 2006).

The polemics against the structuralist bent of racial formation theory can, however, be productive if it helps to elucidate how the deep histories of racial violence energise the embodied plasticity of racial form, its biopoliticisation and productive capacity. This often means a deep engagement of race, Deleuze and feminist and queer technoscience scholarship. Jasbir Puar suggests a new critical dialogue between more structuralist forms of race critique (such as intersectional analysis) that develop schemas for race's interrelation with other forms of social domination and an assemblage theory that crosses the discursive with affective and temporal dimensions of relation (Puar 2012). Putting Catherine Malabou's writings on the brain in conversation with Deleuze, Jairus Grove explains that one of the unfinished projects for theorising control is to think with the destructive potential of plasticity as a more radical refusal of humanism than is available in Burroughs' paranoid framing of control (Grove 2015: 250-1). Furthermore, attempts to open critical race theory to media, war and biotechnical apparatuses might help us understand how racial assemblage does not only operate as an ideological struggle over stereotyped images or content, but through mutations of form. In such analyses, form can govern racial difference and intensify racial crisis while remaining rather disinterested in content or even generating its viral transformation. (Consider,

for example, the scandals over Russian state promotion of racial conflict in US social media, where media bots proliferated contradictory content on race in order to intensify the speed and intensity of race's public articulation.) One possible outcome of the current collision of Deleuzian thought and critical race theory, however, is that such productive openings might be jettisoned in favour of a totalising view of control. As in Sexton's reading, which dispenses with Burroughs' paranoia in order to posit lack of speech as the mundane racial product of modernity, there is a potential for invigorating rhetorical tendencies towards racial exceptionalism and nihilistic, transhistorical readings of racism's psychosocial inevitability. Given the intensity with which race is itself the object of proliferating scales of analysis and meta-analysis in contemporary digital culture – often bent on convincing us of the impossibility of moving racial structure – the narrative of control itself can be taken up as an element in race war, not just a theorisation of it.

Up to now, the relative lack of engagement by critical race theorists with control as a concept may be a result of the short treatment of the control concept by Deleuze, but it is also likely influenced by several other factors, including the generally hostile approach towards the field by followers of Deleuze and Guattari who have made race only one object of criticism in a broader assault on structuralist social theory. Nonetheless, recent contexts in which the virtuality of race appears to accelerate its violence and specular intensity are likely to invigorate interest in theories of control (Puar 2017). In the very disruption of existing racial orderings girded by the system of nation states, post-Cold War conflicts and migration flows crossing the Persian Gulf, Southwest Asia, the Maghreb and North Africa are ripe contexts for thinking how media and war ecologies modulate race's emergent potential. Here we witness the cacophony of state militaries and non-state war machines vivisectioning Syrian, Yemeni and Palestinian landscapes; the informational architectures of social network analysis that digitise the planet and produce the figure of the terrorist as a data aggregate; the dronised becoming-insect of both the Islamist insurgent and the security state; the massive dispossession and commoditisation of migrant outflows to Europe; the dispersal of ad hoc regimes of imprisonment and torture that experiment with the plasticity of the body-brain relation; the improvised border surveillance and sorting out of the racially disposable who cannot be redeemed through asylum. The racial assemblage of control in this context appears to work through the double movement of transiting the state as arbiter of racial domination and the reconstitution of media, war and biotechnical apparatuses around the modulation of new sites of racial crisis that are unleashed as a result. If the geographically dispersed violence instantiated in the current Islamophobic wars appears predictable based on a long-entrenched schema of phenotypic hierarchy – a lethally militarised intermingling of anti-blackness and orientalism sedimented in the deep time of

slavery and colonialism – the mutations of racial form also invigorate the most spectacular dissipations of structure, dissipations which fragment and reconfigure the racial in a manner that suggests that time generally and speed in particular constitute significant concerns for how race is subject to modulation and affective management (Rai 2012). In the planetary conflagrations emanating between the 9/11 attacks and the current rise of fascist politics worldwide, we witness the proliferation of Islamophobias, preemptive killings, carceral violence, mass surveillance, ethnoracialisation of religious forms, and imminent death of the mythic postcolonial social democracy and integrationism of the West. Across these disparate phenomena, racial form cannot be anticipated solely in the contexts of citizenship or exclusion but must be assembled from planetary ecologies of sensation that define a posthuman relation to media, technical and interspecies environments. Theories of control can play a part in developing such an understanding, as long as the relation of control and race can be rethought from the inside out.

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