

# Two SOAPSTONER & Precis

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## Article 1: "Postscript on Societies of Control"

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on Societies of Control". *October*, The MIT Press, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 3-7,  
<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gilles-deleuze-postscript-on-the-societies-of-control>.

Notably, this essay from the postmodern philosopher Deleuze might not appear directly related to modern issues of the growing power of large tech companies. I have to credit *this* video for pointing me to the essay in the first place, but the connection is absolutely fascinating, and I think it's really impressive how accurately Deleuze was able to identify the development of "societies of control" due to technology back in 1992.

## SOAPSTONER

**Subject** The idea of a "society of control", which Deleuze sees as the new form of society, replacing the previous form of society, which Foucault called "disciplinary societies".

**Occasion** This is a journal article published in the MIT Press's *October* Journal. More generally, the essay was first published (in French) in 1990, right near the very early beginnings of the internet.

**Audience** Because the *October* Journal is an academic journal focussed on literary criticism and postmodernism, the target audience is likely academics similar to Deleuze himself. Despite that, Deleuze writes in an extremely approachable manner, featuring clear imagery, extensive analogy, and avoids jargon, making the article appropriate and readable by even a lay audience.

**Purpose** The purpose of the article is to further develop the idea of a “society of control”. First, Deleuze seeks to contextualize this idea by comparing it to Foucault’s ideas of a “disciplinary society” and a “society of sovereignty”, then he seeks to define and elaborate on the different aspects of his theory, and finally Deleuze tries to predict how the society of control will develop. In effect, the overarching purpose is to demonstrate that the idea of a “society of control” is a useful and accurate theoretical tool for describing the postmodern condition.

**Speaker** Deleuze writes in the third person, like most academic articles, but avoids being completely dispassionate. He does not mince his words, like many academics do, openly declaring that “[w]e are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure” and that “[t]he coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill.”

**Tone** Deleuze’s tone is argumentative and rational. He focusses heavily on the logic used to arrive at his positions. At times, the language is dense, philosophical and rigorous. For example, when first introducing the analysis of a society of control, Deleuze points out that comparisons across institutions in a disciplinary society are “analogical”, while on the other hand “different control mechanisms are inseparable variations [form] a system of variable geometry the language of which is numerical”. Not being familiar with what is meant by “analogical” or “numerical” might throw the reader off. Nonetheless, Deleuze tempers the heavy philosophy with some more understandable definitions, drawing clear parallels to real world imagery, “Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point.” A reader unfamiliar with the philosophy can still understand that the “controls” he is identifying meld and flow like a “self-deforming cast” or a bending mesh sieve.

While he appeals to popular reason, “But everyone knows that these institutions are finished, whatever the length of their expiration periods”, and presents dramatic depictions of the growth of societies of control that everyone can empathize with, “the corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry . . . [as] an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within”, he also ensures that a rigorous philosophical argument is also present. In general, Deleuze’s tone is rigorous

and academic, but punctuated with lightness and stylistic flair, which makes it a joy to read.

## **Rhetoric**

**Ethos** Deleuze develops his ethos through a number of different techniques. He begins the essay by explaining Foucault's idea of a disciplinary society, "Foucault has brilliantly analyzed the ideal project of these environments of enclosure". Although this is crucial for his argument, beginning by contextualizing the work in the broader academic discourse also serves to demonstrate to the reader that Deleuze is well read on the subject and knows what he's talking about. He further establishes ethos with an allusion to "the heroine of Rossellini's *Europa '51* could exclaim, 'I thought I was seeing convicts.'", and another to *The Trial* by Kafka.

**Pathos** Although Deleuze generally avoids emotion and focusses on the logic of his argument, some of the aforementioned stylistic flair can be seen appeals to pathos. For example, he ends the essay by warning young people that "they're being made to serve, just as their elders discovered, not without difficulty, the telos purpose of the disciplines." Further, he uses imagery to illustrate this point, "The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill." Eliciting a visceral reaction out of his reader, "I don't want to be made to serve", Deleuze ensures that his cautionary message is not lost. Another animal analogy is found in the discussion of the shift from the gold standard to a fiat currency, where he compares disciplinary societies to "[t]he old monetary mole is the animal of the spaces of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control. We have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent".

Some of the examples that Deleuze uses could also be interpreted as appeals to pathos. For example, in the discussion of the loss of individuality in societies of control, he says "Individuals have become "dividuals," and masses, samples, data, markets, or "banks."". With the value that our society places on the idea of individuality, becoming a "dividual", nothing but a data point in a computer, is perhaps the most terrifyingly dystopian thing many of us could imagine.

**Logos** The vast majority of Deleuze's argument is logos. Indeed, the bulk of the essay is in a section literally titled "Logic". This section begins with the definitions discussed earlier, comparing enclosures to "molds", and controls to "modulation[s]", like the "self-deforming cast".

But from there, he applies his analysis of societies of control to a series of different situations. He begins, much as Marx does, with the factory, which he says has been replaced by the corporation. Where the factory balanced “the highest possible in terms of production [with] the lowest possible in terms of wages”, the corporation is more like “a spirit, a gas”, with “modulation of each salary” controlled through “challenges, contests, and highly comic group sessions” and “the brashest rivalry”.

He similarly illustrates a clear line of logic in looking at the way in which computers have facilitated the growth of societies of control. He begins by drawing an analogy between the simple machines of the “old societies of sovereignty”, following by the industrial and electrical machines of disciplinary societies, and finally concludes that computers must be the machine of the new society of control. The analogy naturally lets the reader follow his logic, effectively using logos to further his argument.

## **Precis**

In “Postscript on Societies of Control”, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze argues that humanity is entering a new type of society, which he names a “society of control”, and predicts the trajectory of such a society. Deleuze develops his argument by first summarizing the philosopher Michel Foucault’s work on disciplinary societies, then contrasts the idea of a society of control with a disciplinary society, systematically working through several different aspects of societies where this shift is visible, and finally concludes with a caution about where he sees this shift going. Deleuze’s purpose is to argue that the idea of a “society of control” is a useful and accurate theoretical tool for describing the postmodern condition in order to let people understand their society better. Deleuze’s tone is academic and rigorous, but punctuated with lightness and stylistic flair, which makes it approachable for even a non-academic audience to be able understand and appreciate his arguments.

The most fascinating thing about this article is how accurate Deleuze’s predictions were, considering that the article was written in 1990. In 1990, the internet had just barely begun to exist, and was still extremely inconvenient to use, and “Big Data” was less than a megabyte. Google wouldn’t exist for another 10 years, and even as late as 1994, the government was pursuing anti-trust action against Microsoft for including Internet Explorer instead of Netscape Navigator in windows. The internet was still seen as a wild west, a

great equalizer that might fulfill the promises of equality made from the Enlightenment. Anyone could make a website, as long as they had an internet connection, and perhaps the dream of a truly equal society could begin to be achieved. As we know today, that is not the trajectory the internet took. Over the course of the next 30 years, the internet came to be dominated by a small handful of capitalist corporations, and the new digital technology was integrated into a surveillance state of unimaginable proportions. Deleuze manged to predict the shifts in the corporate form – the way Amazon uses technology to surveil its warehouse workers through inhumane conditions, the way Amazon pits its various teams together in “the brashest rivalry” under the guise of an “excellent motivational force”. Indeed, few things describe our modern existence, bouncing from one Zoom call to the next, mindlessly scrolling from one YouTube video to the next Reddit post, than “but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network.” But to approach this a bit more systematically, Foucault argues that in a society of discipline, “enclosures” – like the prison, the hospital, the school, the factory, and the house – were the mechanisms of discipline. Because “[t]he individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another”, the very structure of a disciplinary society enforces discipline. But for Deleuze, a society of control has made those enclosures come in “inseparable variations”. Everything from your phone to your credit card to the facial recognition cameras as you board a plane all collect data on you, and it is perfectly legal for this data to be sold without your consent, and shared with the government. These are the new mechanisms of the exercise of power, Deleuze says. And crucially, where a disciplinary society exercises that power by *restricting* the freedom of its people, a society of control does the same by granting that freedom. You are free to purchase things on your phone, but that very purchasing is surveilled through the NSA’s data collection. This is what makes societies of control so dangerous, why Deleuze compares them to a “serpent” – they give the impression of expanding freedom, but then uses that expanded freedom as the new instruments of power. Much the same as Deleuze predicted corporations would be begin to exert “continuous control” over their employees, our constant use of Google and Instagram begins to exert “continuous control” over us.

## Article 2:

Leetaru, Kalev. “Facebook As The Ultimate Government Surveillance Tool?”. Forbes, 20 July 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2018/07/20/facebook-as-the-ultimate-government-surveillance-tool/?sh=e7b9fd92909c>.

### SOAPSTONER

**Subject** Facebook’s unscrupulous and ethically questionable use of the massive amounts of data that they collect, and the risks associated with the collection.

**Occasion** This article is in response to a report by the Guardian which revealed that Facebook had kept track of whether its user with “interested in *treason* against their government”. More broadly, the article comes after a myriad of accusations against Facebook for unethical data collection, most famously, the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

**Audience** Forbes is a business magazine, so the audience is largely businesspeople, though there may be some lay readers who want to appear *sophisticated*.

**Purpose** The purpose of the article is to argue that Facebook’s data collection poses a grave danger to free society and seeks to speculate on and warn us about the risks. It cautions us about the path we are on, and rather cringily concludes with “Welcome to a world even Orwell could not have imagined”.

**Speaker** Unlike many informative journalist articles, this one occasionally slips into the first person, bringing in his personal experience “I can personally attest that there are many governments across the world that very much aware of the potential of Facebook’s advertising tools for surveillance”, or his past writing, “As I alluded to earlier this week, what happens when countries in which homosexuality is a criminal offense”. While this isn’t particularly pervasive or distracting, it does make this article feel more informal, a bit more like a blog than a proper opinion piece.

**Tone** The article’s tone is concerned and fear-inducing. For example, it uses loaded language, suggesting that the 65k affected Russian citizens were placed at “grave risk”, or highlighting how the algorithms “silently observe” the users. By personifying “the algorithm”, Leetaru makes it sound more scary and worrisome.

Multiple allusions to *1984* also bolster the fearmongering tone, personifying the machine learning system as “it hums along in silences” like “Big Brother”, and suggesting this is a world “even Orwell could not have imagined.” Similarly, after quoting Facebook’s response to question about its data policy, Leetaru provides commentary “[s]uch a response is truly frightening”.

## **Rhetoric**

**Ethos** Leetaru has a fair bit of ethos because he’s writing in Forbes magazine. He doesn’t do much more to bolster his ethos. He cites a Guardian article for the subject of his article, which at least shows he’s not making everything up, and the anecdotes he includes, “I can personally attest that there are many governments across the world that very much aware of the potential of Facebook’s advertising tools for surveillance” seems to imply that he has important connections which could also build ethos (though perhaps that’s better interpreted as an anecdote and a logical fallacy).

**Logos** There is a fair amount of logos in this article. Most of the implications that Leetaru arrives at he does so with logos. For example, he begins with the general issue, that the “platform’s algorithms silently observe its two billion users’ actions and words,” and that these tools can “identify geographic areas and demographics”, then considers how Facebook might hand over data about sexuality or other traits in response to a court order, then finally concludes, “what happens when countries in which homosexuality is a criminal offense that can potentially bring the death penalty use Facebook’s tools to target those communities?”. This is a deductive argument, starting with a general premise and arriving at a specific conclusion, and is a good example of logos used in this article.

**Pathos** The article uses a lot of pathos to make its point. Even barring the allusions to 1984, Leetaru repeatedly makes appeals to emotion. For example, he presents his performative disbelief in response to Facebook’s statements about adhering to court orders with regards to data, “It is remarkable that the

company would not even consider placing the life safety of their users ahead of its marketing interests”. More performative appeals to emotion are found as Leetaru begins a paragraph with “Such a response is truly frightening”, and speculates about “knowingly assists a repressive regime”. This is a purely hypothetical situation, nothing but speculation, and the loaded language “repressive regime” is nothing but an appeal to pathos.

Even a sentence which contains factually true information, which Leetaru has proven, is heavily and unnecessarily editorialized, “Facebook is increasingly playing as a tool for law enforcement, intelligence agencies and repressive regimes to crack down on legitimate dissent or internationally recognized human rights”. Was it really important to describe “repressive regimes”? I’d be pretty concerned if *any* government used a tech company to find out my sexuality using a machine learning system. And what is “illegitimate” dissent? It feels like Leetaru is just including loaded words that have clear moral connotations to make an association in the readers mind without a clear line of argumentation.

The conclusion that Leetaru presents is also disturbingly unconnected with the arguments. He finishes with “social media is increasingly helping to elevate the voices tearing it apart”, which has *absolutely nothing* to do with the points presented in the article, and I suspect that the general focus on fearmongering is what lead to that sentence being included.

## **Precis**

In the essay “Facebook As The Ultimate Government Surveillance Tool?”, the Forbes magazine contributor Kevin Leetaru argues that Facebook’s extreme data collection and analysis capabilities make them an extremely powerful and risky weapon for the government to engage in mass surveillance. Leetaru begins with an article from the Guardian about Facebook recording an individuals likelihood of treason, then speculates about the possibilities of government use of such software, and finally cites quotes from Facebook saying it intends to cooperate with governments. The purpose of the article is to argue that Facebook’s data collection poses a grave danger to free society and seeks to speculate on and warn us about the risks. The tone is dire and fear-inducing, but the author also tries to present themselves as a rational person just making an argument, appropriate for the audience that Forbes, as a business magazine, has.



While in general, I agree with the concerns that Leetaru puts forth, I think he does so inartfully. I would agree that Facebook collecting information on people's likelihood of committing treason is *extremely* concerning, and I think the concerns about personal details sexuality being revealed to governments that might have criminalized them is a very illustrative example (though I think an even better one would simply be people plainly organizing against the government on Facebook). I think this very accurately fits Deleuze's characterization of a "society of control". The supposed freedom gained from Facebook is actually a proxy for further surveillance. The mechanisms through which power is wielded have begun to meld and flow into the structures of society, so that even a platform which purports to increase freedom – Facebook lets you communicate with people you otherwise would not have been able to – actually serves as an apparatus for the use of power. However, as prescient as these concerns are, Leetaru undermines himself by failing to address the concrete and material harms of said surveillance. Leetaru is more concerned with painting Facebook as an "all-watching Eye of Sauron" than he is interested in assessing the impacts of governments being able to surveil the communications of rebels or revolutionaries. As I see it, if governments are able to exercise their authority through the very mechanisms of communication, the hope of any revolutionary anti-government action diminishes exponentially, precluding the people of such a country from overthrowing a tyrannical government. But instead, Leetaru sees Facebook's data collection as an issue of "ethical and moral standards of today's Silicon Valley", instead of the very real and material harms that a shift in the mechanisms of power in society can bring about. Altogether, Leetaru's critiques are prescient and accurate, but he fails to fully develop why the surveillance is a problem.

Ok I'm sorry I know you said that it shouldn't be 12 pages – I promise it didn't take me three hours to do this! And in my defense, I didn't make it double spaced until the end, so I thought I only had 3-4 pages for most of it.