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SPECIAL ISSUE: ENVIRONMENTS, SPACES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

### **Social media as surveillance: Digital spaces and the societies of control**

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**Abstract:** This paper takes as its starting point the theory of the transformation from what Michel Foucault (1975; 1995) called ‘Disciplinary Societies’ to ‘Societies of Control,’ per Gilles Deleuze (1992). It aims to formulate an understanding of surveillance on social media as part of a modulatory system of capital-extraction which transforms innocuous web usage into heavily-exploited immaterial labour. This form of dataveillance differs from Foucault’s theory of panopticism in many ways, and makes a compelling argument for an ostensibly ‘post-panoptic’ reading of new forms of digital ‘dataveillance’ (Clarke 1988). Using a geolocative patent from Google as its key example, the paper will show how social media surveillance modulates in an open space, unlike the static panoptic watchtower. The control society’s dissolution of panoptic enclosures, however, leaves subjects no less entangled in the processes of capital.

#### **Introduction**

Social media web platforms perform a function of quotidian surveillance which is central to their business model of delivering individualised content and advertisements to users. I argue that the form of surveillance adopted by sites like Facebook and achieved across Google’s host of services departs in many ways from the dominant model of ‘panopticism’ set out by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), better reflecting a strategy of what Gilles Deleuze called the ‘Societies of Control’ (1992). Social media surveillance therefore reflects

a shift from a 'disciplinary' strategy of power to one of modulatory 'control'. This paper takes Google's (2010a) geolocative patent (US 20100287178 A1), which proposes to use private information to calculate physical location estimates and better serve localised advertisements, as an example of the intersection between post-panoptic surveillance, extra-disciplinary strategies of power, and incessant, individualised marketing as an 'instrument of social control' (Deleuze 1992, p. 6). The analysis of this patent is especially pertinent as social media takes on a central role in the production of neoliberal subjectivity through its impact on the changing nature of sociality, consumption, and the immaterial labour (Lazzarato 1996) of the global culture industry.

This paper deals primarily with the problem of what Christian Fuchs (2012) calls 'economic surveillance' undertaken for corporate gain by social media companies targeting their users. Where does this form of surveillance fit in the movement from discipline to control? Is it possible to completely discount the concept of the panopticon from this surveillance landscape? I hope to contribute to discussions around these questions in this paper. It begins with a brief overview of Foucault's concept of discipline and its exemplary technology, the panopticon, contrasting the enclosure of discipline with the open spaces of control, before reviewing the arguments for and against panopticism in the digital. The emphasis here is on the 'transience' of strategies of power and on where Foucault's writing overlaps both concepts. A discussion of economic surveillance on social media shows that a 'modulatory' control model fits better than one of panoptic discipline, and an analysis of the locative Google patent highlights the ways in which it departs from the panoptic ideal.

### **Discipline and Panopticism**

Foucault's theses of disciplinary societies and panopticism are well rehearsed. In the course of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, power began to construct strategies for creating 'docile bodies' which could be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1995, p. 136). Foucault conceived of power, rather than something 'held' or owned, as structuring relations; a 'micro-physics' (1995, p. 26), or a 'multiplicity of force relations' (1978, p. 92) where power is a strategy which *produces* discursive space, rather than simply *repressing* within it. The three strategies that Foucault enumerated in his work were 'sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management' (2007, p. 143), which exist in a 'system of

correlation' (2007, p. 22), meaning that all three strategies co-exist throughout history, but at different moments one can be seen to take precedence over the others.

Foucault emphasised the role of surveillance in discipline, writing,

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (1995, pp. 202-3)

In short, rendering subjects visible also renders them susceptible to the coercions and transformations of power, which distribute and organise bodies according to a productive and obedient norm. For Foucault, the design of Jeremy Bentham's conceptual 'panopticon' prison perfectly captured this logic and the strategies underlining disciplinary power. As Deleuze (1988) notes, however, the panopticon's real form (of a prison) and function (of 'seeing without being seen' (Bentham 1995, p. 43) is less significant to the overall concept of discipline than its abstract diagrammatic role as a 'figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use' (Foucault 1995, p. 205). The abstract formula of panopticism is simply, '*to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity*', (Deleuze 1988, p. 34, original emphasis) which is summarily and in loose terms the overall goal of discipline.

Importantly, this abstract and diagrammatic reading of panopticism (as simply imposing a particular conduct with the aim of producing a docile subjectivity) is the key feature of panopticism which persists in what we might term 'control surveillance' today, as I will soon show. Control surveillance escapes the more concrete elements of panopticism, such as the focus on coercion and the distribution of bodies, as it is characterised by an opening up of the disciplinary interiors and an inverted strategy of visibility. It incorporates what Roger Clarke (1988) called 'dataveillance', referring to 'the systematic use of personal data systems in the investigation or monitoring of the actions or communications of one or more persons' (p. 499). While the abstract concept that Foucault conveyed in the panopticon persists online, its concrete function has largely dissolved. The disconnect between the physical panopticon's form and function, and the abstract panoptic impulse of imposing conduct, is what leads to applications of the panoptic in surveillance situations

which it does not adequately describe. This dulls the effectiveness of the panoptic critique today, as 'surveillance' becomes synonymous with 'panopticism', and 'panopticism' equated to 'discipline', leaving no space for non-disciplinary interpretations of contemporary surveillance strategies, such as on social media.

For Foucault, the panopticon's key function was its ability to transfer the responsibility for individual management from an authority to the self – it internalised power within its subjects. He believed that the panopticon epitomised this decisive new strategy for ordering behaviour which relaxed the brutality and spectacle of punishment and opted instead for the economy of self-governance. This enabled authoritative power to 'throw off its physical weight' and tend to the 'non-corporal' (1995, p. 203). 'The more it approaches this limit', wrote Foucault, 'the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance' (1995, p. 203). As I will soon show, this description of an intangible and simulacrum power is strikingly similar to that of control in Deleuze (1992), meaning that we can perhaps conceive of control as discipline's tendency towards an ideal of automatic, non-corporal and self-oriented power brought toward its upper limit with the assistance of the technical, economic, and political transformations of neoliberalism.

Deleuze (1992, p. 3) reminds us that Foucault saw the 'transience' of the disciplinary model. References to profundity, flexibility and non-corporality of power at discipline's upper limit are littered throughout *Discipline and Punish*:

While, on the one hand, the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become 'de-institutionalized', to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a 'free' state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted. (1995, p. 211)

Here, Foucault describes the disciplinary impulse to engender a desirably docile subjectivity being liberated from the institutional enclosures and modulating freely in 'flexible methods of control'. This is exactly the transience Deleuze described: expanding away from interior institutions to open and non-corporal networks, the relational structures of disciplinary power begin to take on the strategy of control.

## Societies of Control

Deleuze's 1990 (translated to English in 1992) 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' is intended to be read in the context of Foucault's conceptualisation of discipline. Deleuze frames control as an advance or an adjunct to discipline and a new historical epoch brought about by a combination of technologies (computer networks), political economy (neoliberalism), and a 'generalised crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure' (Deleuze 1992, pp. 3-4). William Bogard elaborates on this final point, explaining, 'confinement cannot satisfy the expanding needs of capital for greater mobility of labour, speed of communication, and risk management' (2012, p. 31). By 'neoliberalism', I understand an approach to governance which privileges individual responsibility and competition over welfare and community, and which seeks to imprint this emphasis on the competitive '*homo aeconomicus*' (Foucault 2008) through privatisation and deregulation, and the 'natural' flow of the free market.

Thus, the control society's defining characteristics are its deviations from the disciplinary model. Rather than fixing bodies in time and space, control allows economic, geographic, and temporal barriers to dissolve, allowing people and power to circulate freely and fluidly in the world. But what appears as liberation from constricting interiors is a more profound entrapment in an exterior ruled abstractly by the same ordering impulse as discipline; having escaped the disciplinary interiors, we find there is no 'outside' control. The subject of the control societies is perhaps freed from the disciplinary cage, but nonetheless leashed to it.

Deleuze describes this new strategy of power as 'modulatory' (1992, p. 4). Modulation suggests the flexibility of the control societies, which rearrange their form in order to appropriate the productivity of their populations, and to co-opt their differences, deviances, and resistances within the neoliberal system of advanced capital. The disciplinary enclosures were '*molds, distinct castings*', Deleuze writes, 'but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other' (1992, p. 4, original emphasis). The focus here is on a strategy of power, and in particular power motivated by capital, which opens up the social world and breaks apart the strict institutional categories of the disciplines, while at the same time rendering this whole extra-

institutional field serviceable to its interests. It does this by being flexible, able to shift on its feet, and finding a way to infiltrate and capitalise every aspect of contemporary life. This flexibility depends also on a particular neoliberal conceptualisation of capitalism and the 'consumer society' (versus an industrial society of production). Surveillance theorist David Lyon summarises this intersection, noting that 'consumption has become the all-absorbing, morally-guiding, and socially-integrating feature of contemporary life in the affluent societies. Social order – and thus a soft form of social control – is maintained through stimulating and channelling consumption, which is where consumer surveillance comes in' (1994, p. 137). This 'soft' social control maintained through consumption, and bolstered by economic surveillance, can be seen as part of the modulating control strategy, as it is extra-disciplinary and dependent on the economic freedom of its subjects. I will show shortly how a network of quotidian dataveillance across Google's services aims to 'stimulate and channel' consumption.

Referring back to Foucault's hints at a non-corporal disciplinary ideal, control can be seen as a 'perpetual victory' without need for 'physical confrontation' which is 'decided in advance' by simulative technologies and strategies (Foucault 1995, p. 203). Simulation is an essential characteristic of the societies of control, and the key which unlocked the disciplinary interiors for both populations and power. Where confinement was fundamental during the nineteenth century to maintain control, today's technological capabilities for tracking and predicting movement make it largely unnecessary (Bogard 2012, p. 32). Control surveillance therefore simulates invisibly; it tracks and predicts, rather than working to confine, coerce, and intimidate. It functions within the neoliberal context which produces the normative discourse of continuous surveillance, and makes keen participants of its subjects.

In the *Birth of Biopolitics* series of lectures, Foucault refers to an 'image, idea, or theme-program of a society' on the horizon which is not 'exhaustively disciplinary' and does not function, as the disciplines do, on the basis of 'general normalisation and the exclusion of those who cannot be normalised' (2008, p. 259). Instead, this society would function on 'an optimisation of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, [...] in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals' (2008, pp. 259-60). This neatly reflects Deleuze's

illustration of a modulatory form of power that erodes internal barriers while saturating their externality. The 'systems of difference' are especially significant for discussions of the political economy of social media surveillance, which simulates and capitalises upon subjects' most marketable points of difference, rather than attempting to discipline those differences away; in the heterogeneous space of the web, there is a market for every form and flavour of deviance. Foucault in the 1970s saw the seeds of a fluctuating, environmental form of power in the neoliberal evolution of discipline; Deleuze in the 1990s saw the realisation of that prospect in simulative network technologies and crises of the institutional interiors; today, the modulatory strategy of control finds its purest and most refined articulation to date in the surveillance and consumption-based business models of social media.

Referring to the changing definition of 'work' which has blurred in order to slip away from its previous spatial and temporal confinement, Deleuze writes that 'The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network' (1992, pp. 5-6). Where the waged work of industrial society saw subjects only as labourers for the twelve hours that they produced commodities in the disciplinary spaces of factories, work in the societies of control escapes these boundaries. This shift is enabled partially by communications technologies and neoliberal impositions to work outside of work hours, but also due to the culture industry's appropriation of subjectivity. Maurizio Lazzarato collects these contributing factors under the concept of 'immaterial labour', which refers both to the 'informational' nature of the post-industrial commodity, and 'a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work" — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion' (Lazzarato 1996, p. 132). As the next section will illustrate, these activities involve the use of social media, which produces 'connectivity' as a commodity (cf. Van Dijck 2013). Put differently, it produces a capitalisable 'social map' (as Facebook itself terms it) charted by control surveillance.

Like Deleuze's 'Postscript', Lazzarato's paper discerningly describes processes in the 1990s that social media has since come to exemplify nearly twenty years on. For instance, Lazzarato writes of the immaterial commodity that it is 'not destroyed in the act of

consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the “ideological” and cultural environment of the consumer’ (1996, p. 137). This presciently outlines the function of commercial digital space, and specifically the strategy of targeted advertisements: consumption of social media services does not erase them, but informs them, enabling them to produce targeted advertisements which aim to predict and reflect the consumer’s interests. The subjectivity engendered by immaterial labour in digital spaces is thus ‘active’ and commoditised, engaged in the quotidian social activities that produce taste, fashion, and culture. Subjectivity is put to work reproducing itself, leading Lazzarato to proclaim, in a reflection of the societies of control, ‘The fact that immaterial labour produces subjectivity and economic value at the same time demonstrates how capitalist production has invaded our lives and broken down all the oppositions among economy, power and knowledge’ (1996, p. 142).

If we take a wider understanding of work as not only a waged job, but as immaterial labour where, per Tiziana Terranova, ‘knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited’ (2000, p. 37), then a whole host of other contemporary processes become recognisable within a framework of continuous, exploitative work.

### **Social Media Surveillance**

Included among those processes are the quotidian functions and usages of social media which find subtle, surreptitious, and insidious ways of monetising their ostensibly cost-free services. Deleuze writes that the corporation ‘is a spirit, a gas’ in comparison to the brick and mortar factory (1992, p. 4), and I see web-based corporations like Facebook and Google epitomising this gaseousness in two ways. First, they constantly expand to occupy as much space as possible, branding themselves on millions of websites and application interfaces in order to universalise their presence in our lives. Second, their business operations are gaseous in that they are difficult to see or grasp. Compared with traditional capitalist enterprises, it is not obvious how they make their money. What are they selling? When do we pay them? How do they convert their inconceivably large user populations into inconceivably large capital? Put simply, what we may perceive as the leisurely usage of free services, functions for them as free labour actualising the social framework of their



platforms and generating a commodity in the swathes of personal data capitalisable through targeted advertising. Social media makes it, in Lazzarato's terms, 'increasingly difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time. In a sense, life becomes inseparable from work' (1996, p. 137).

Social media platforms, and in particular social networking sites like Facebook, appropriate the labour of users to produce commodities in three interrelated ways. First, users produce the content that actualises the framework of web platforms. Without the input of Facebook's 1.32 billion users (Facebook 2014), the site would be useless, meaningless, and most of all, valueless. Second, social media platforms accumulate personal information – digital dossiers on individual users' interests, relationships, political leanings, and a host of other metadata – which can be on-sold to inform targeted advertising. To this end, it undertakes widespread and automated mass-dataveillance with the aim of both simulating and stimulating consumer desires through individualised advertisements. Finally, users generate attention for those advertisements, which allows Facebook to extract capital from even the most passive uses of their platform. While this third strategy of monetising audience attention has long accompanied commercial mass media, it has undergone significant refinements in recent decades with the emergence of targeted advertising and the increased scarcity of attention in a competitive mediascape overflowing with options.

Summarily, social media are engaged in 1) creating a framework for the user-generated content that actualises the platform and attracts their audiences, 2) drawing personal information out from this content in order to establish users' consumer interests, and 3) using that information to hone in on consumer desires in targeted advertisements. This three-pronged strategy operates within a modality of normalised surveillance and systems of fetishised consumerism in which the act of consumption is essential to the production of desirable subjectivities. Thus, the success of sites like Facebook is evidence of the liquidity of surveillance and the importance of consumption to meaning-making and social categories in contemporary Western societies.

Lyon, in conversation with Zygmunt Bauman, writes that,

Surveillance spreads in hitherto unimaginable ways, responding to and reproducing liquidity. Without a fixed container, but jolted by 'security' demands and tipped by

technologies' insistent marketing, surveillance spills out all over. (Bauman & Lyon 2012, p. 9)

The concepts of 'liquidity' and 'gaseousness' are evoked by images of the disciplinary 'container' being supplanted as its surveilling impulse overflows and pours into the private minutiae of social life. Like the control societies' formless, adaptable corporation, liquid surveillance seeps from the panoptic enclosure and fills the cracks that previously evaded visibility. This occurs under the influence of two forces, "'security" demands' and 'technologies' insistent marketing'. With 'security', Lyon refers to the rhetoric of 'national security' which has used the exaggerated threat of terrorism to authorise exceptional extra-judicial security responses (cf. Agamben 2005), including overbearing surveillance programmes. 'Marketing' refers to the drive for ever-more-accurate targeted advertising narrowcast on the internet, which requires advertisers to collect detailed information about individual consumers.

These two forces 'jolting' surveillance – security and marketing – can be equated with Fuchs' distinction between 'economic and political surveillance as two major forms of surveillance' (2012, p. 43), where agents of the state (secret services or the police) engage in *political* surveillance which carries the threat of the law and targets undesirable behaviour, and agents of the market engage in *economic* surveillance which coerces subjects to consume or produce commodities. This is a useful distinction, but should be deployed with a caveat. In many situations, as Edward Snowden's PRISM files revealed, these forms overlap: economic surveillance is appropriated for political uses, and the economic project of consumer surveillance fits within a framework of neoliberal governmentality. The political/economic distinction is useful for identifying the actors undertaking surveillance, but those actors have overlapping motivations and techniques, and are the capillaries for different strategies of power. That said, I conceive here of economic dataveillance on social media, per Lyon, primarily as a non-disciplinary technology of 'soft social control', but I recognise that social media can also be the site for coercive and violent forms of surveillance. Surveillance today escapes binaries or totalising conceptualisations; the panopticon does not adequately describe all forms of surveillance, but it cannot be wholly discounted or subsumed under control, either.

Scholars have long debated the applicability of the panopticon concept to the contemporary surveillance landscape, especially since the rise of web-based dataveillance. Kevin Haggerty (2006) calls for surveillance theorists to 'tear down the walls' of the panopticon, which he claims misrepresents or overlooks many instances of surveillance today. For Haggerty, the slew of new '-opticons' each indicates a 'limitation, or way in which Foucault's model does not completely fit the contemporary global, technological or political dynamics of surveillance' (2006, p. 26). Haggerty adds that the panopticon has now come to stand for surveillance itself, as theorists deploy the term in shorthand, often without 'sober evaluation' of whether the surveillance practices really reflect a panoptic schematic (2006, p. 26).

Haggerty warns that the panoptic model 'masks as much as it reveals, foregrounding processes which are of decreasing relevance, while ignoring or slighting dynamics that fall outside of its framework' (2006, p. 27). This underlines the argument that a Deleuzian control perspective in some situations better describes the operation of power and surveillance than does the panopticon. Zygmunt Bauman agrees that the 'classic panopticon' is no longer the template organising spaces across wholly disciplinary societies, but is 'really only visible at the margins' (Bauman & Lyon 2012, p. 55). In particular, Bauman argues against the use of the panopticon to describe services like Facebook and Google, as they undertake surveillance not to enforce 'the monotony of the binding routine', as in Bentham's vision, but to 'stalk' or track users' 'patterns of desires' (Bauman & Lyon 2012, p. 66).

Fuchs emphasises the violence of both forms in his distinction between 'political' and 'economic' surveillance. Both forms aim to control the behaviour of a population who 'should be forced to behave or not behave in certain ways because they know that their appearance, movements, location, or ideas are or could be watched by electronic systems' (2008, p. 267). Fuchs rejects Haggerty and Ericson's wider concept of the 'surveillant assemblage' (2000), claiming that Haggerty's examples of surveillance which fall outside the panoptic model can be conceived instead as 'monitoring', a gentler, non-violent form of data collection versus 'surveillance' (2008, p. 268). For Fuchs, Haggerty and Ericson's approach casts a wider net which underemphasises surveillance's repressive characteristics. 'Surveillance' for Fuchs, compared to 'monitoring', is always violent, always aimed at

management of the population through the threat of visibility, and thus always panoptic. What this position overlooks is that, in a control society, power works to manage populations in non-coercive ways. Fuchs argues that a panoptic internalisation of power can still be induced by non-state actors, but this is not what post-panoptic perspectives dispute. Rather, they see, per Roy Boyne's (2000) term, the panopticon's coercion *displaced* by alternate strategies of seduction and simulation which rely no less on surveillance, but an *invisible* surveillance which penetrates from all sides – not an imposing watchtower.

In the panopticon, the problem of surveillance misdirects – the true operative component is the tower itself. This was Foucault's most significant deduction about the trappings of surveillance in disciplinary society: comprehensive surveillance is impossible, but the ubiquitous *threat* of surveillance works equally well. Online, and in the control societies, this is less often the case. Where panoptic surveillance works without really working, by internalising the threat of its operation in the prisoners' minds, online dataveillance actually does see and record everything, and it would prefer for that process to remain invisible.

When theorists apply a panoptic critique to the digital, they make concessions and qualifications to produce new '-opticons'. However, in digital space, the central tower becomes the decentralised network, the coercive leer becomes the seductive and invisible algorithm, the disciplinary imposition becomes the modulatory ebb and flow of control, and the interior walls become the simulative caesurae. Of course, disciplinary power and elements of the panoptic persist: surveillance undertaken on social media is asymmetric, it can contain an element of violence, and users are at least partially aware of it the same way Bentham's prisoners had to be aware of the watchtower (Fuchs 2012; Best 2010). But when the specificity of the panoptic is curtailed to describe a surveillant situation that it does not fit, all that is left is the abstract disciplinary function of producing a desirable conduct in a particular human multiplicity. This is a disservice to the concept and, as Haggerty (2006) argues, dulls the critique of many surveillance contexts, social media included.

Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011) summarises the paradigm shift in control surveillance, writing that, 'unlike Bentham's prisoners', we are not threatened by the presence of surveillance from corporations like Facebook, Google, and Amazon, and thus 'we don't

regulate our behaviour [...] instead we don't seem to care' (p. 112). This unthreatened stance is in the interests of those conducting the surveillance, he continues:

They have an interest in exploiting niche markets that our consumer choices have generated. These companies are devoted to tracking our eccentricities because they understand that the ways we set ourselves apart from the mass are the things about which we are most passionate. (Vaidhyanathan 2011, p. 112)

On the basis of this shift in the methods and motivations of surveillance, I challenge the applicability of the panopticon to contemporary models of economic surveillance as it takes place on social media. When so many qualifications must be made in order to fit the concept to the context of networked technology, neoliberal political economy, and the modulatory strategies of 'gaseous' corporations, then perhaps it is time, as Deleuze writes, 'to look for new weapons' (1992, p. 4).

### **Locative Media and Google**

An important development in control surveillance is its emphasis on the 'locative' dimension of mobile social media. 'Locative media' is the name for forms which specifically integrate geographic metadata into their services, or else use global positioning to render serviceable the immaterial labour of users – Greg Elmer (2010) calls this difference 'finding and being found'. Locative dimensions in new media have become near universal as 'smart' mobile devices proliferate and 'questions of location and location-awareness are increasingly central to our contemporary engagements with the internet and mobile media' (Wilken 2012, p. 243). The success of the smartphone application *Foursquare*, which combines users' location with an ethos of consumer loyalty and urban exploration, has contributed to locative integration becoming widespread: 'Check-in' features on Facebook and Twitter now allow users to share their location in a status update or tweet. The case study in this discussion of control surveillance – Google's geolocational patent – centres around locative characteristics.

Social media's mobility, its gaseous expansion into the developing world, and its desire to incorporate geographic location into the services it offers (and extracts from its users) links to the idea of surveillance spilling out of containers and filling the lacunas and cracks in extra-disciplinary life. The ideal contemporary Western subject is rarely without

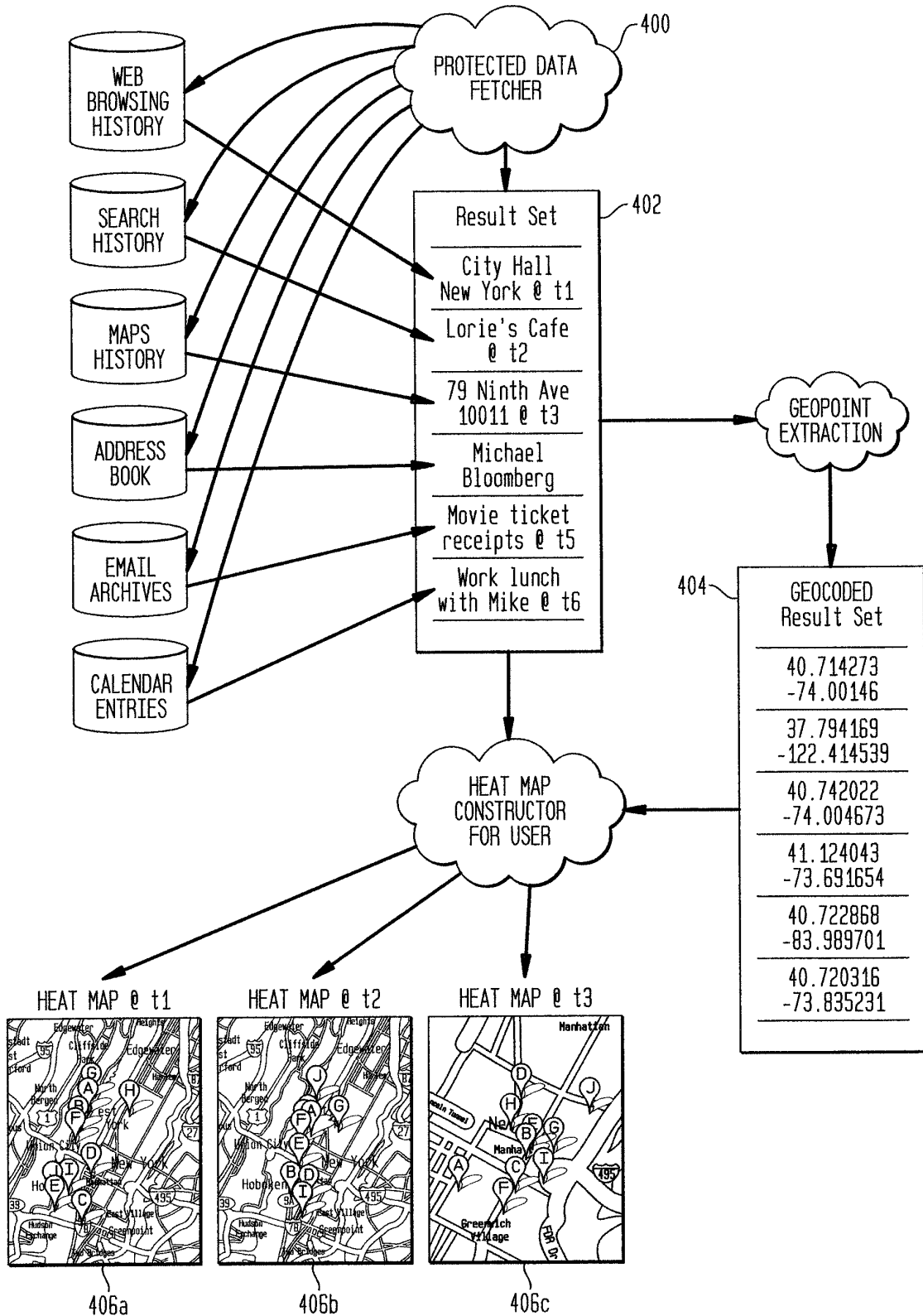
her internet-connected phone (how else can her labour access her at any time or place?) and thus rarely distant from a device which, for all the luxury, efficiency, and betterment that digital technologies may afford, holds her within the grip of modulatory power. As Lazzarato shows, the rise of immaterial labour redirects the surveillant focus of businesses from the inner workings of the factory, to 'the terrain outside of the production process: sales and the relationship with the consumer' (1996, p. 140). Locative media enables that focus to pin down its subjects, despite their mobility in the open space of the control society. It engenders an aspirational neoliberal subject with an onus to produce informational commodities both as part of their waged job, and as producers of the capitalisable *zeitgeist* on social media. In this way, alongside the subject, surveillance breaks out of the disciplinary enclosure in the form of a simulative, tracking, and ever-present locative technology.

Google patent US 20100287178 A1 has the catchy title of 'Refining location estimates and reverse geocoding based on a user profile', which translates approximately to 'Using information gathered through digital social platforms to guess where you are going in the physical world.' The patent proposes to take user-inputted clues from browsing histories, search histories, map histories, address books, calendar entries, and emails to 'build a spatial index of specific physical locations,' from which 'heat maps identifying particular locations from the user-related sources are created for different periods of time' (Google Inc. 2010a). These heat maps would build on other methods, such as Global Positioning Satellites (GPS), cell tower triangulation, and Internet Protocol (IP) geocoding, in order to further refine location estimates. The authors of the patent note that their invention could be applied to give driving directions, as well as for

seeking a more accurate location when searching around the user's location for businesses, people etc., for more accurately broadcasting the user's location to his/her friends, and for accurately geocoding any photographs a user has taken with his/her cellular phone. (Google Inc. 2010a)

In short, the patent proposes to improve the accuracy of locative media (and therefore its efficacy in enabling consumption or rendering user inputs serviceable to the platform) through an automated, albeit user-authorised, system of dataveillance monitoring private inputs across a range of digital media forms. Considered in relation to another Google

patent (US 7668832 B2), 'Determining and/or using location information in an ad system', which highlights the usefulness of geolocation data to targeted advertising (Google Inc. 2010b), this proposal evokes Deleuze's reminder that 'Marketing has become the centre or the "soul" of the corporation', and 'the operation of markets is now the instrument of social control' (1992, p. 6).



**Figure 1.** An image from patent US 20100287178 A1 showing the automated collection of data from numerous private sources to produce 'heat maps' (Google Inc. 2010a).



A panoptic critique of this form of automated dataveillance would struggle to prove that it was a wholly disciplinary technology ordering or distributing enclosed bodies in space and time, or that a visible but unverifiable surveillance was coercing subjects to behave in a normative manner. On the other hand, a control society perspective fits this patent into an environment of generalised quotidian surveillance that saturates a field of open and free activity, and hinges on simulation, modulation, and the continuous effort to bring a population towards consumption and render capitalisable their everyday social lives. Rather than telling users where to go in order to make themselves productive or obedient, as in a school, factory, or prison, the logic underpinning this patent is inverted: let people go where they like, but use geolocative tracking and flexible marketing techniques (for example, the personalised digital noticeboard of *Google Now*) to capture and render profitable their free activity. This occurs by using geolocation to refine and deliver targeted advertisements. Such a strategy is simulative, in that it seeks 'to control a process in advance by verifying it first in its model' (Bogard 2012, p. 31), evoking Foucault's foretelling of a kind of control that is a 'perpetual victory [...] always decided in advance' (1995, p. 203).

This patent may seem like a fairly benign and trivial technology, but it can be problematised from the control or liquid surveillance perspective in two ways. First, the innocuous and quotidian 'everyday' nature of this form of marketing normalises and generalises a surveillance paradigm which transcends the internal barriers of the enclosure that marked the limits of panopticism. This is a distinctly 'liquid' form of surveillance which invisibly (unlike the disciplinary observation tower or CCTV) collects information and seamlessly integrates its findings within a consumerist framework to optimise the work of markets as the 'instrument of social control'. Second, as commentator Bill Slawski (2010) notes, Google may have a significant advantage over other providers of location-based services, because this geolocative strategy builds upon its vast, well-entrenched existing framework of search, maps, email, and so on. Vaidhyathan stresses the high stakes involved when Google has such tremendous power to rank knowledge, writing that Google's algorithmic biases 'affect how we value things, perceive things, and navigate the worlds of culture and ideas' (2011, p. 7). When this logic is applied to locative media, then what Carlose Barreneche calls Google's 'PageRank epistemology' gains a very tangible power over our experience of urban life and commerce: 'The major issue of concern is that the power

law of information that gives shape to the asymmetrical and centralised topology of the internet, whereby the most heavily linked sources rule the network [...] could be reproduced in the topology of population flows in urban spaces' (Barreneche 2012, p. 337). In other words, Google's monopolistic power to surveil, inform, and direct consumers could have a tangible impact on our navigation and experience of cities and marketplaces.

Earlier, I wrote that the constant factor in disciplinary and modulatory surveillance is the abstracted objective of producing docile, self-governing subjects – through coercion in the panopticon, and seduction in the open space of liquid surveillance. Bringing this locative example back to the concept of control, I argue that the service envisioned in this patent aims to cultivate a consumerist subjectivity by using surveillance to optimise experiences of the market, to structure subjectivity within Google's 'PageRank epistemology', and to seduce using fetishised, targeted consumption options. Most significantly, this example inverts the disciplinary function of ordering bodies in space and time, instead emphasising the simulation of subjects' free movement in an ostensibly open social field. Where a disciplinary approach would struggle to reconcile this strategy of surveillance with the form and function of the panoptic enclosure, a Deleuzian control perspective easily connects it to modulatory forms of 'soft' social ordering.

### **Conclusion**

This paper argues that the framework of surveillance that funds, structures, and courses through social media departs in many ways from the panoptic model which, for Foucault, epitomised the strategy of the disciplines. The openness, profundity, non-corporality, capitalistic motivation, and inverted function of visibility demonstrated in surveillance tactics like Google's geolocative patent better suit a 'modulatory' understanding of power within societies of control. Disciplinary spaces and panoptic forms of surveillance certainly still persist in many realms of society, but in the space of social media – and in every interaction with locative mobile media – these forms are entangled with a control surveillance geared towards simulation and seduction, rather than confrontation and coercion.

The social media business model is wholly dependent on the input of users, who provide the platforms with content, generate the commodity of personal information, and

consume targeted advertisements, and this changing nature of 'work' is central to discussions of the hypothesised shift from discipline to control. Taking Lazzarato's concept of 'immaterial labour' as the production of commodities for capitalist owners of the means of production not limited to waged labour, helps us to understand how post-panoptic surveillance is motivated by capital to render sociality serviceable to the market and advertisers, and thus make it complicit in a hegemonic form of 'soft social control'.

Finally, the concept of locative media, epitomised in the case study example, fits neatly into a control surveillance framework. Google's patent simultaneously emphasises the free movement of individuals in an open milieu, and the generalised and quotidian surveillance used to incorporate this movement into the overarching individualised and simulative market strategy of Western consumer society. Thus, the liberating rhetoric of mobile social media should be met with careful scepticism. What appears from a disciplinary standpoint as emancipation from dark interiors can be read from the perspective of control as a more profound entrapment in an exterior saturated by visibility.

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