



Colonial Control

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Just prior to his untimely death in 1961 in a hospital in the United States of America, Franz Fanon taught a series of lectures at the University of Tunis. His lecture notes include a section titled “Le contrôle et la surveillance”, in which he makes “social diagnoses, on the embodied effects and outcomes of surveillance practices on different categories of laborers when attempts are made by way of workforce supervision to reduce their labor to an automation: factory assembly line workers subjected to time-management by punch clocks and time sheets, the eavesdropping done by telephone switchboard supervisors as they secretly listened in on calls”, and other forms of management by surveillance (Browne 2015: 5-6). Here, Fanon produces an original account of control as an alienating and dehumanizing force of social production. Importantly for Fanon, technologies of control also generate and reinforce subjective experiences of racialization as an aspect of dehumanization in capitalist modernity. Yet, despite Fanon’s close intellectual friendship with Sartre and his involvement with Parisian philosophical circles during the postwar period, the emerging generation of French poststructuralist thinkers who became Sartre’s heirs do not seem to have regarded Fanon’s work on control as influential upon their groundbreaking theorizations of contemporary power and social production. As Simone Browne notes (2015: 165), Foucault does not reference Fanon in his early lectures on discipline and affective embodiment in “Madness and Civilization”, delivered during his own residency from 1966 to 1968 at the University of Tunis; nor does he cite Fanon’s work in his later lecture series on biopolitics and security delivered at the Collège de France from 1977 to 1979. Similarly, although Fanon’s critical approach to psychoanalysis is mentioned in passing by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), Fanon is not cited by Deleuze (1988) as a precursor to *his* subsequent thinking about Foucault’s account of “disciplinary society” as a paradigm of modernity. Deleuze’s “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, which Gregory Flaxman (2019) argues should be read as an afterword to Deleuze’s earlier book on *Foucault*, again fails to consider Fanon a relevant source of knowledge regarding the nature of those power formations Deleuze believes are characteristic of a more contemporary shift towards “societies of control” (Deleuze 1992).

Of course, this is not to say that Deleuze was disinterested in colonialism or racism. In fact, a steady stream of scholarship demonstrates the relevance of Deleuzian philoso-



phy applied to the critique of colonialism and racism, and to the development of anticolonial, decolonial or “excolonial” perspectives (see e.g. Bignall/Patton 2010; Bignall 2010; Patton 2010; Saldanha/Adams 2012; Burns/Kaiser 2012; Bignall 2014). And yet, in the Postscript – his most focused articulation of the “control society” – Deleuze’s thinking about control as a “new” formation of power “beyond” the disciplinary society elaborated by Foucault, ignores and elides colonial racism as an historical feature of a globally pervasive form of control. I believe this greatly diminishes the potential of Deleuze’s framework for advancing an adequate understanding of the nature of control, and is insensitive to the possibilities for active resistance articulated by Indigenous peoples through centuries of colonial domination. Indeed, although Hannah Arendt (1968) points to imperialism as a source of the fascist totalitarianism that marks a turning point for European political society in the twentieth century, Continental philosophers have been typically disinclined to analyze colonization as a fledgling framework for biopolitical societies of control, including the neoliberal variants theorized by Deleuze. Similarly, in the main, they have not been motivated to think much about the imperial and racist character of the disciplinary operations undergirding modern power in its paradoxical internalization and expulsion – assimilation and elimination – of difference. This elision of colonial racism as a formative and persistent element in a nascent politics of discipline and control raises questions about the accuracy of Foucault’s and Deleuze’s accounts of the historical movement from sovereign power to disciplinary modernity to biopolitical posthumanism as a global phenomenon of the late twentieth century. My aim in this essay is to trouble the temporalization of “control” as a new operation of power after “discipline”, since biopolitical elements of a control network appear historically (and continue today) in imperial technologies of racialization and in settler-colonial power formations. To illustrate this, I proceed by mapping aspects of European imperialism, via the exemplary case of Australian settler-colonialism, onto the three thematic divisions – History, Logic and Program – that structure Deleuze’s brief “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1992).

History

One of the most vile and gruesome practices of colonial imperialism involved the theft and global trade of Indigenous human remains, resulting in the dispersal of ancestral bodies through international collection networks. Indigenous peoples historically fought strenuously against the desecration of their dead and sought to protect their ancestors and guarantee them proper funerary rites, and Indigenous communities today continue to struggle for the repatriation of the remains and belongings of their ancestors from the imperial collections of museums erected on their homelands and from institutions in



Europe and the United Kingdom (see Fforde/Hubert/Turnbull 2002; Hemming et al. 2020a, 2020b; Hemming/Wilson 2010). Cressida Fforde explains:

Collections were amassed from the later years of the eighteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century and were compiled to represent skeletally (but also sometimes with soft tissue) the different ‘races’ of the world, so that they could be measured, compared and analysed to understand human variation and origins. Such analysis was undertaken at a time when perceptions of human diversity were deeply rooted in notions of biological determinism and racial worth. These notions were themselves entangled within the contemporary colonial ideology and practice, supporting, and deriving from, a belief in European superiority. (2004: 1; see also Bernasconi 2001)

The clandestine removal of Indigenous human remains, animal life and other cultural property from ancestral Countries¹ and communities – typically taken without the consent of Indigenous authorities or kin and very often in secrecy by grave-robbars – occurred in all British settler-colonial societies, but Aboriginal Australian remains were “the most highly ‘prized’” (Fforde 2004: 1). This is because, according to the imperial imaginary, Indigenous Australians represented the “lowest” scale of humanity; and sometimes were considered a form of animal life “below” or “before” humanity. Indigenous Australians thus constituted the basis from which all of human life could be compared in a racist hierarchy of ascendancy with European man positioned at the apex, naturally and without question. The “scientific evidence” for this claim about natural European human superiority was supposedly found in the physical differences observable between Indigenous Australian and European bodies, and especially by the measurement of crania and their surface characteristics, which were taken to indicate relative differences in natural intelligence. As forms of “proof” relied upon in the imperial science of racism, the skulls and skeletons of Indigenous individuals were highly desirable commodities that sold for significant prices on an international market:

The scientific importance placed on Indigenous human remains, coupled with their relative inaccessibility to scholars in Europe and the belief that the Australian ‘race’ was on the verge of extinction, meant that remains were rare and valuable commodities that could be exchanged for a variety of goods and services. (Fforde 2004: 69)

As is the case with the European Union’s neoliberal exchange mechanism referred to by Deleuze, in this earlier process of commodification, we can see evidence of the way in which colonial “control relates to floating rates of exchange, modulated according to a

¹ For many Indigenous Australians, as for many Indigenous peoples around the globe, land is inextricably connected with all living matter and all Being, in a complex system of consubstantial interdependence and continuous co-emergence involving human and nonhuman bodies, minds, spirits, air, sky, water, plant life, and ancestral agencies (see e.g. Rose 2000). This relational ontology of interdependence translates (poorly) as the concept of ‘Country’, which is capitalized here to indicate its particular cultural significance.



rate established by a set of standard currencies” (Deleuze 2003: 5). Even when they were collected by body-snatching or other dubious means, a gift of Indigenous human remains to scientific institutions could also bring significant prestige to the donator, such as entry to elite scholarly societies. However, as Fforde notes, the “most common and tangible rewards that donors received in return for human remains were items of scientific literature, and these would have been difficult to obtain by other means in the colonies” (2004: 72). For collectors, too, “Indigenous human remains were [...] used as exchange specimens. Curators of colonial museums used indigenous remains as currency to enlarge their own collections” (Fforde 2004: 74).

The colonial archive details the criminal activities of “an international web of contacts through which human remains were gathered” (Fforde 2004: 2, *passim*). The bodies or body parts of many Aboriginal Ancestors (or “Old People”) were removed illicitly from burial sites. Others were obtained prior to the body receiving funerary rites when members of the medical profession removed the deceased from hospital morgues, asylums, prisons, scaffolds, or massacre sites for the purpose of “scientific study”, often sending human remains back to institutions in Europe where they had received their medical training (Fforde 2004: 44). In my home town of Adelaide, for example, early members of the colonial medical establishment included Edward Stirling, Director of the Adelaide Museum and Professor of Physiology at Adelaide University; and William Ramsay-Smith, who was Chairman of the Central Board of Health, City Coroner, Inspector of Anatomy and a doctor at the Adelaide Hospital. These powerful men, amongst others, occupied privileged positions of access to the bodies of the deceased and became prolific suppliers of Aboriginal remains to the collection at the University of Edinburgh, which by 1939 had alone accrued “the skulls of over 1660 individuals [...] and the remains of at least six hundred Aboriginal people” (Fforde 2004: 43). Equally disturbing, these networks for the global transport and collection of human dead also involved the participation of men whose families were complicit with the international trade in human life and had accumulated vast wealth from the slave trade. For example, Edward Stirling’s forebear, Archibald Stirling, had received more than £10,000 in compensation from the British Imperial Parliament for his “loss of property” following the abolition of slavery in the 1830s (see Coventry 2019).

Indeed, the “scientific” rationale behind the international trafficking of Indigenous human remains was itself linked with a line of enquiry that played a role in the ideological justification of slavery, or conversely in arguments for its abolition. Debates concerning the origin and nature of human diversity also influenced the development of policy for the “just” treatment and “protection” of Indigenous peoples in the course of European and British colonization of Australia, Aotearoa-New Zealand, Canada and the Americas. Especially from the seventeenth century, when sea-faring Europeans began to study diverse peoples in far-flung regions of the globe, scientific discourse after Kant debated



the origins of human difference, with opinion divided “between those who advocated unity and those who advocated plurality” (Fforde 2004: 9; see also Bernasconi 2001). The classification of humankind through comparative anatomy involved the quantification and cataloguing of human differences. For many, in accordance with Christian orthodoxy, the aim was to collect evidence for underlying principles of unity that showed human difference was the result of environmentally-influenced divergence from a single primordial stock. On this view, the various human “races” were all participants in a universal humanity, and colonization was justified on “humanitarian” grounds that aimed to elevate “primitive” Indigenous peoples to a more advanced (European) standard of achievement and civilization. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the height of global slave trade, there was an increasingly prevalent view that racial differences were so great as to indicate separate species of human, springing not from a single source but from plural origins. Measurements of racial distinction in the characteristics of human skeletal and tissue remains were used to support scientific assertions regarding the “numerous varieties of race” and “proof” of “black inferiority in measurements that apparently demonstrated their smaller brain size” (Fforde 2004: 20). The polygenist insistence on incommensurable human diversity springing from multiple sources of creation supported claims about the “natural propensity” of the different races to different kinds of activity: thus, the “inferior black races” were presented by European anatomists as “naturally suited to slavery”, and it was asserted that they would eventually die out if emancipated. Biological assimilation was considered by polygenists to be racially detrimental, especially to the “superior (European) race” that would be degraded by miscegenation. The potential for miscegenation was heavily policed in colonial societies: Robert Young (1994) has detailed the fastidious taxonomy of race that developed in the nineteenth century to discipline and hierarchically categorize the varieties of racial degeneration produced by the mixing of various degrees of “blood quantum”: pureblood, half-caste, quadroon, octoroon, and so forth.

From this historical description of colonial racism emerge the contours of a racialized logic of control that is concerned with the quantification and classification of human variation. The following section describes aspects of this logic. We will see how the hierarchical management of race was achieved through the imperial creation of vast information networks through which Indigenous human remains were dispersed and exchanged as mobile units of currency. Colonial racism is, I suggest, a dark precursor to the ascendant logic of control that Deleuze observes arising in the second half of the twentieth century.



Logic

To some extent, the internment of deceased Indigenous individuals as “specimens” in imperial museums and universities is an exemplary phenomenon of the modern disciplinary society described by Foucault as characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries. Like the prison, the hospital, the factory, the family and the school, such institutions were “environments of enclosure”, whose purpose was “to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose a productive force” (Deleuze 1992: 3). Likewise, the binary operation of racism that distinguishes “white” from “non-white” is a disciplinary tool of division that plays an essential role in the maintenance of a colonial order. Racial segregation is necessary when social productivity depends upon the expropriation and redistribution of Indigenous resources and labor, to profit a ruling class that is constitutively identified as racially elite. Yet, the program of imperial racism driving the collecting impulse displays a logic of control that is different in kind to that of discipline, and seems better understood in terms of the political operation Deleuze describes as the “progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination” (1992: 7). In comparison to disciplinary technologies,

control mechanisms are inseparable variations, forming a system of variable geometry the language of which is *numerical* [...]. 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. (Deleuze 1992: 4)

Disciplinary racism that works by binary “molds” is different from racialized control, which works by “modulation”. Colonial domination often relies upon a binary categorization of “white” and “non-white” bodies to *discipline* identities in the service of a colonial social order. However, it can also involve colonial *control* as the mobile positioning of bodies across a mutating field of privilege and disadvantage – and of relative levels of social enjoyment – that varies according to the intersectionality of identity as raced/classed/gendered, and so forth. When colonial racism is denied significance as an element of control, then we miss something important about the nature of racism and of colonial domination, and furthermore we miss something important about the nature of control.

The racialized operation of control is described well by Ghassan Hage (1998), who depicts Australian racism as a way of managing national space in accordance with the hierarchical positioning of bodies across a field of “whiteness”. This enables its complex conceptualization, not simply as a binary system of thought opposing the categories of “white” and “non-white” and an associated technology informing the development of institutions of inclusion and exclusion, such as citizenship; but also as a more informal, mobile, everyday practice of micropolitical engagement. Racism in this second sense is a



corporeal and affective practice, in which actors perpetually struggle to assert and embody a privileged mode of “occupying the nation” that enables them to be “spatially empowered to position/remove the other” from the field of enjoyment (Hage 1998: 42). Here, nationalism is “a state of the body. It is a way of imagining one’s position within the nation and what one can aspire to as a national” (Hage 1998: 45; see also Moreton-Robinson 2015). Australian settler-colonial nationhood was shaped by the colonial denigration of Indigenous peoples and by the “White Australia Policy”, each valorizing whiteness as a primary signifier of the cultural capital that is prerequisite for a citizen’s enjoyment of the governmental “power to position others within the nation” (Hage 1998: 65).² As a valuable form of cultural capital, whiteness creates “*differential modalities of national belonging* as they are experienced within society” (Hage 1998: 51). The modalities of national belonging are differential and mobile because *within* the system of whiteness there exists a hierarchy of cultural capital and associated political entitlement determined by the complex interplay between race, gender, class and other factors of political identification, which defines gradations of political capacity and enjoyment. Those at the top of the whiteness hierarchy will typically also enjoy gender and class privileges; differentiations and complex interactions between these categories overlay and assist the political distribution of bodies within national space, determining citizens’ shifting and differing capacities for social agency and governmental action. When it is conceptualized in terms of a strategic distribution of bodies across a field of whiteness, it becomes apparent that national belonging and civic enjoyment involves participation within a naturalized political order headed by a “national aristocracy”. Such aristocracies “consolidate their power by naturalizing their own topography of the nation: the positions that constitute the national field and the capital needed to occupy them” (Hage 1998: 65). Accordingly, Hage insists:

A national ideal does not only idealise the position of the dominant within the nation, but also a whole series of positions and the relations between them. It consists of a map of what for the dominant are idealised positions and idealised types constituting these positions. That is, the dominant in the national field do not only have an ideal of themselves in the field, but also an ideal of all the positions in it, that is, an ideal of the field itself which they struggle to impose. (1998: 65-6)

² Formally titled the Immigration Restriction Act (1901), the “White Australia Policy” was the first legislative Act of the new Australian Commonwealth. The Attorney-General Alfred Deakin explained in 1901: “That end, put in plain and unequivocal terms [...] means the prohibition of all alien coloured immigration, and more, it means at the earliest time, by reasonable and just means, the deportation or reduction of the number of aliens now in our midst. The two things go hand in hand, and are the necessary complement of a single policy — the policy of securing a ‘white Australia’.” (Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates, Immigration Restriction Bill, Second Reading, 12 September 1901). The Immigration Restriction Act remained in place until 1966, when Australia became a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination and it became apparent that Australia’s new international commitments were vastly at odds with its internal system of racist policy. Australia ratified the Convention in 1975.



In the white nationalism of the Australian settler-colonial society, we can discern the “operation of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant” (Deleuze 1992: 7). The “science” of racism, developed through comparative anatomy in the modern period of colonization, was crucial for the development of a graded field of whiteness that circumscribes and monitors differential access to political enjoyment within the Australian nation, including by the computation and labelling of racialized bodies in terms of blood quanta and degrees of degeneration or deficiency in relation to a normative (European) standard of human perfection. Here, unlike in the institutional “enclosures” of disciplinary society, “what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person’s position – licit or illicit – and effects a universal modulation” (Deleuze 1992: 7). The racialization of bodies and subjectivities through the attribution of degrees of whiteness (and relative deficiency or imperfection) is a basic element of the grammar employed in “the numerical language of control” (Deleuze 1992: 5). We have seen how the movement and placing of Indigenous human remains across a global network of collections produced an imperialist databank that contributed to the “categorisation of racialised ideas about Aboriginal people and was part of a global movement of analysis using the ideologies of eugenics [...] concerned with racial purity, blood quantum, and hierarchies of race” (Baker 2018: 2). A body’s potential for occupation of the category “Indigenous” is constantly modified according to calculations of “blood quantum” and gradations of “purity”.

For Indigenous peoples, the “active danger” of a colonial control society is “piracy”, in the starkest possible manifestation imaginable (Deleuze 1992: 6); not only in the seizing of Indigenous peoples’ lands and the appropriation of living Aboriginal bodies for use as an indentured workforce, but also in the theft of the corporeal remains of deceased Aboriginal persons for sale or exchange on an international market. Indeed, the division of the stolen bodies of Indigenous Ancestors into “parts” for transport and collection can be considered as an original forerunner of our contemporary control society, in which “Individuals have become *‘dividuals’*, and masses, samples, data, markets or *‘banks’*” (Deleuze 1992: 5). Viewed from the perspective of colonized Indigenous peoples, it therefore appears unsurprising that “the operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters” (Deleuze 1992: 6), since the dehumanizing process of capitalization of/on human life (and death) has long been a defining practice of settler-colonialism as a pervasive form of control society that establishes itself and develops systematically through racial discrimination.

This highlights also how the market logic of control blurs the distinction between production and product, or between cause and effect. For example, racism is a formative influence in colonial networks and social systems, and at the same time structural differentiation in terms of race is a produced effect of the network circulation of power and its consolidation through repetition in particular nodes or operations. Consequently, as



Neel Ahuja (2016: 27) has asserted, “racism must be understood not simply in its rhetorical form as a set of moral infractions, but rather as an effect of the material formation of social relations and their imbrication in more-than-human networks of settlement and ecological reproduction”. The racialized/racist “subject” of a network control society is, then, certainly not a given (human) agent vested with the capacity to direct social progress towards a desired end, but rather is an emergent effect of a dynamic series of “metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation” (Deleuze 1992: 5). In control society, writes Deleuze, “man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt”, and indeed, the Indigenous subject of control is “never finished with anything”, always incomplete, lacking, permanently insufficient or deficient, “disadvantaged”; forever required to insert him- or herself into government-funded programs for socio-economic development in a continuous quest for self-improvement through “states of perpetual metastability” (1992: 6, 4; see Cornell/Kalt 2007). A control society is accordingly defined by its “limitless postponements” (Deleuze 1992: 5), corresponding also with a distinct mode of juridical life involving the constant suspension of the law and the increased normalization of states of exception that become the rule. Ruth Gilmore (2007: 28) similarly defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death”. As Giorgio Agamben (1998) points out in his consideration and refocusing of the Foucauldian project, this juridico-political operation of exception is not a new phenomenon that now supersedes and replaces the models of sovereign power and discipline of earlier eras, but rather is an original and defining structure of biopolitical sovereignty apparent throughout the ages of Western political society.

This claim by Agamben is especially persuasive when the long history of Western imperialism and the biopolitics of slavery are taken properly into account in attempts to theorize the nature of power and of political society. If, as Deleuze (1992: 6) asserts, “the disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network”, then it is apparent that control has been a feature of human political society for a very long period of time. Indeed, one can only think of control as a new mode of dispersive and fragmenting political life arising in the twentieth century by remaining blind to the experiences of Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial situations including Australia, Canada and Northern America, who have survived histories of legally-sanctioned displacement and forced migration from homelands and the extralegal dispersal of their ancestral remains and cultural property through global networks and information archives. The long human history of slave trade likewise exemplifies elements of social control, in which human life is defined principally in market terms and is subject to global dislocation through networks of productivity and purchase. Perhaps the newness of our contemporary control society concerns rather the complexity and the encompassing universality or reach of the networks in which we participate today as (racialized) subjects of the Anthropocene. In-



deed, the climate refugee is emerging today as an exceptional mode of life that seems likely to become ever-more standard. And, as Ahuja (2016) warns, the emergence – or production – of this new kind of impoverished migrant subject is accompanied by an inevitable escalation of the mechanism of control that has its origins in colonial racism and today is evident in a prominent global discourse of “human security”. With veiled racism, this presents the climate refugee as a disruptive threat to the social order of wealthy “First World” nations, rather than properly expressing how the productive and wasteful activities of these same rich nations are the major contributors to the environmental risks that create climate refugees in the first instance.

In this context, liberal responses to climate change invoke ‘human security’ – a form of liberal imperialism that integrates militarized technologies into the government of environmental, biological and social systems. Despite the apparent internationalism of human security, which purports to transcend narrow national security agendas, this discourse is increasingly deployed as a form of governance integrating war and control. Combining network analysis, surveillance, policing, military intervention, and the statistical management of populations, economies and environments, human security activates a ‘posthuman’ biopolitical form that corresponds to Michel Foucault’s turn from discipline to security and to Gilles Deleuze’s conception of a control society [...] In this modality of control, bodies are targeted not primarily through techniques of inclusion and exclusion, nor through subjectivation, but rather through the calculation of gradations of difference in population constructions. (Ahuja 2016: 28-29)

If racism is thus reinscribed today, simultaneously as a formative aspect of contemporary control society and as an effect of the biopolitical discourse of human security, then I have argued here that such developments should themselves be understood as emerging from an historical colonial racism. This is perpetuated in current settler-colonial social formations and through the globalized neoliberal imperialism that governs (or abandons) life in the era of the Anthropocene.

Program

According to Deleuze, control society “presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within” (1992: 5). This feature complicates the orchestration of a viable program of resistance to the politics of control since, as Frida Beckman has remarked, “control society incorporates opposition and critique within itself” (2016: xxii, see also 2018). Rather than direct opposition, then, a viable program of resistance may require a strategic use of the force Agamben (2014) refers to as a “detrimental power”, with the potential to render control systems “inoperative” by replacing their generative conditions with creative substitutes that can materialize alternative



kinds of social and political structure. If, as I have argued following Deleuze, the “constituent” logic of control society includes colonialism, racist dehumanization, dislocation and division, then an alternative logic of collaborative alliance encompassing situated practices of “becoming-human” and “excolonialism” may release “new forces knocking at the door” (Deleuze 1992: 4), enabling creative lines of escape from prevailing and pervasive conditions of control in settler-colonial societies. I have earlier elsewhere defined “excolonialism” as an “exit from colonialism”, connoting a constitutive break from postcolonial societies of control.³ I use the prefix “ex” in “excolonial” in the same way that I would use it to describe an ex-partner: it describes a former relationship from which I have extricated myself, an ex-relationship that remains an inescapable part of my personal history and which has shaped me as the character I am today, but from which I have now qualitatively distanced myself. Excolonialism breaks with longstanding colonial habits of engagement, opening up avenues for forming new styles of interaction and relationship appropriately supported by bicultural or intercultural legal, political, economic and social institutions. Whereas control society proceeds by “the brashest rivalry”, normalized by a neoliberal culture of conflict and competition, these new styles of engagement will be carefully collaborative and associative. Rather than engaging in a divisive or oppositional politics of combative resistance, partners in a transformative program of excolonialism will strive for mutual reward through respectful practices of selective agreement, which they will seek actively to orchestrate and institutionalize as the sanctioned structures of an excolonial public culture and society-in-the-making (Bignall 2014; Bignall 2019).

Deleuze characterizes “societies of control” in terms of a neoliberal tendency towards social fragmentation and the radical splintering of collective life, exacerbated as processes of individualization extend to technologies of “dividualization” when subjects are commodified as data and dispersed through vast information networks. As we have seen, settler-colonial societies have long been characterized by a racist identity politics of white hyper-nationalism that extracts racialized data from individual Indigenous bodies for the pathological constitution of a social order defined by varying and mobile echelons of privilege. Each stratum is distinguished as an intersectional modulation registering degrees of separation from a baseline category of Indigenous “disadvantage”. Consistent with this approach, settler-colonial policies addressing Indigenous “disadvantage” typically treat this as an individual pathology rather than a structuring colonial legacy, potentially remedied by individual efforts towards “gainful” employment and social “decency”. For example, successive renditions of Australia’s “Close the Gap” policy consider that apparently intractable measures of Indigenous social disadvantage will be reduced if Indigenous individuals make suitable personal choices that keep them out of

³ This term was first coined and defined in Bignall 2014. On discontinuous history as a (continuous) process of exit, see Bignall 2010, chapter 6. See also Foucault’s (1984, 1986) writings on Kant and Enlightenment.



jail, support their health, and enable a “normal” upbringing in an untroubled (nuclear) family life (e.g. Pholi/Black/Richards 2009). Settler-colonial societies have also long been characterized by a desire to erase persistent forms of Indigenous collectivity supporting structures of self-governance, since these challenge the legitimacy of colonial sovereignty when this is based in spurious notions that Indigenous societies were “too primitive” to be considered as First Nations vested with aboriginal sovereignty and highly developed systems of law. Likewise, the possibility that Indigenous Nations retain their original sovereignty, unrecognized by the British Colonial Office at the time of invasion and settlement, contests the Australian Government’s claim to represent a united Australian people uniformly governed under its exclusive national sovereignty and the legal apparatus imposed at colonization. As a positive form for the future after colonialism, excolonialism in Australia calls for a process of re-collectivization that affirms the postcolonial reality of legal pluralism and multiple polities. This is a prerequisite condition, enabling Indigenous and settler peoples to materialize a different method and process of social constitution through an affirmative ethics of co-existence. Excolonialism calls for collaboration through complex sets of affective interactions in accordance with a political ontology that preserves difference and diversity as a creative condition of a genuinely shared social life, produced ethically as an equitable outcome of plural sovereign engagements.

Excolonial relations can accommodate both agreement and disagreement simultaneously, because excolonial agents understand each other as complex, mobile and multidimensional collectives; they interlace “bit by bit” in “piecemeal insertions” and selective encounters, and not in their respective entirety (Bignall 2014; Deleuze 1990: 237-43; Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 504). Over time, cohabiting powers can learn to appreciate and affirm those aspects of their coexistence that bring mutual benefit (even if these are overall or by comparison very few or minor in nature), and to avoid or minimize interactions where disagreement is trenchant and irresolvable. From selective engagements that bring positive affections and shared enhancement, further benefits might actively form over time. An approach to political identity as open, complex and shifting – and to social relations as partial, selective and piecemeal – gradually enables the incremental transformation of widespread hostility born from colonial control towards more amicable forms of sociability built from alternative dispositions and forces of constitution. This future possibility requires that social partners will have sound knowledge of self and other, so that they can effectively decide how their relationship can best be orchestrated to bring mutual benefit and avoid those aspects of their involvement that they can predict will diminish or destroy one or both. Importantly, whereas settler-colonialism is a form of control society that relies upon the erasure or dismissal of the sovereignty of First Nations peoples – abundantly evident in the practices of piracy described above – excolonialism proceeds through mutual regard when sovereign partners enter actively into orchestrated relations of understanding and agreement such as those found in suc-



cessful treaty arrangements. At the same time, excolonial relations acknowledge the determining right of each partner to refuse those aspects of engagement that threaten to harm or diminish them; excolonialism, then, incorporates a “politics of refusal”, recognized by some Indigenous activists as fundamental to their strategic agenda (e.g. Simpson 2017). Excolonial practice requires the development of culturally relevant institutions able to promote and protect these principles of sociality. For Indigenous peoples whose economies, social structures of self-governance and cultural archives have in many instances been devastated by the dispersing technologies of colonial control, repatriating processes of Indigenous Nation rebuilding are a crucial step towards identifying, organizing and acting once more as self-governing entities (see Cornell 2015; Jorgensen 2007; Vivian et al. 2017). As future partners in a potential excolonial relationship, it is fitting that settler-colonial powers will responsibly support Indigenous Nations as they strive to reclaim their sovereign capacity and rebuild institutions for the expression of their political authority as a prerequisite condition for self-determined, active engagement in excolonial relations. Indeed, excolonial-type strategies of Indigenous Nation rebuilding already play a role in re-collectivization and associated efforts towards the dismantling and transformation of the exemplary form of control society that is settler-colonialism (e.g. Rigney/Bignall/Hemming 2015).

Central to such efforts are strategies to counter the dehumanizing tendencies of de-subjectivation that Deleuze (1992) also identifies as a key feature of a fragmenting and dispersive politics of control. The work of rebuilding self-determined and coherent forms of subjectivity for a reinvigorated humanity is both individual and collective in its nature and scope. For example, as she contends with the intimate presence of her own Aboriginal family’s traces in the imperial collections held by State institutions, Ali Baker writes about the authoritative and ethical task of “becoming human” she faces. For Baker, this is a means of repudiating the “anti-memorial and absence of honouring” she finds in “the debris of documents and objects scattered throughout institutions in dark places, documents of abuse and lies” that attest to the racist operations of colonial knowledge formation (2018: 6):

When [the ethnographer Norman] Tindale chose to make a cast/bust of my great grandmother’s head, and place that cast within the museum collection, he objectified and abjectified her within the colonial archive in perpetuity. He used her head to stabilise the colonial identity in this place. Colonial objects like head casts or photographs are re-articulated acts of violence upon us, of what has already been done to us as Aboriginal people. They contain the evidence of how we have been “done over.” What happens then when these “objects” of study become human? When these objects of study become scholars and artists? We become human – because while our families and elders may have been denied a humanity by the European invaders, our people never stopped being, were never frozen in time, were never plants or animals of a lower rung of a constructed false hierarchy, a hierar-



chy created precisely to justify the stealing of land while allowing those who benefited from the theft to feel good and righteous about it. (Baker 2018: 2)

Accordingly, whereas settler-colonialism proceeds through the racist dehumanization of an Indigenous class treated as being without subjective agency, resulting inexorably in the institutionalization of a settler regime of inhumane political technologies of segregation and cultural assimilation, excolonialism depends upon shared – though differential – resistive processes of “becoming-human” through processes of self-assertion and ethical engagement. Whereas Indigenous peoples will “become-human” by reclaiming and rebuilding the subjective moorings destroyed by colonialism, the “becoming-human” of settler-colonial society involves the collective reconstruction of a new self-concept, conceived on an alternative basis to the culturally biased model of superiority inherited from European Humanism. Accordingly, excolonialism certainly does not seek for “becoming-human” to reinstate the version of Humanism connected with anthropocentric European modernism and associated also with imperialist and racist programs of global “civilisation”, the subduing of nature and the “improvement” of “backward” peoples. By contrast, excolonialism calls for a mode of relational identification that counters the racist dehumanization central to colonial justifications. Specifically, it calls for an active, open and affirmative mode of comportment and association that joins partners in mutually beneficial relations that enhance their affective potentiality, enabling each to become more complex and dynamic in their activities of relational self-constitution. Excolonial partners will combine carefully in piecemeal and selective encounters that aim for mutual enhancement at recognized sites of shared agreement, while respecting resilient differences that define the specificity or uniqueness of each party and should not be denied, erased or coerced into submissive sameness (Bignall 2014, 2010). While it resists the universalizing Humanism that is a defining feature of the European Enlightenment tradition, excolonialism is not an antihumanism but rather offers an alter-humanism that affirms the constitutive and creative power of difference in situated processes of relational identification involving diverse agencies, including nonhuman and environmental agencies. Excolonialism is best considered in terms of an intercultural framework that brings together Indigenous philosophical perspectives of “more-than-human” existence and ontological plenitude with non-Indigenous frameworks of Continental “posthumanism” (see Bignall/Rigney/Hemming 2016; Bignall/Rigney 2019; Braidotti 2009; cf. Chandler/Reid 2019). That is, excolonialism is an intercultural ethical perspective for guiding positive transformations in complex affective orders that are conceived as fundamentally open and dynamic, formed through expansive relations and diverse ecological networks that both constitute and bind subjects in shifting structures of mutual interdependency, collaborative agency and positive sociability.

Excolonialism proposes to break with the past for the sake of the future; but it does not claim that the past can be surpassed. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples will



carry our colonial histories and crimes with us forever, and colonial legacies of systemic injustice have entrenched vastly uneven playing fields upon which our contemporary political struggles take place. If Indigenous authorities today are willing to partner in treaty with settler society and will tolerate a continuing settler presence on the ancestral lands that colonizing forebears have seized and degraded, the best we can do towards our recovery of a shared humanity is to create our futures on the basis of a different set of power relations. These must surely be motivated by an alternative spirit of engagement and comportment enabling new forces of association that strive for reciprocity and parity in processes of negotiated consent. Micropolitical relations joining culturally diverse citizens in piecemeal civil engagements propel this kind of shift, which over time might incrementally consolidate a macropolitical order as the institutionalized habits of an excolonial society. Excolonial social transformation is a challenge we have scarcely begun, but for all that it is not a utopian or ideal endeavor. Excolonialism already exists as a minor or destituent force within every actual settler-colonial control society, dispersed through social networks and permanently apparent, exercised in a quotidian multiplicity of positive affects and mutually productive encounters. In his thinking about the epochal shift from disciplinary formations towards societies of control, Deleuze writes “there is no need to ask which is the toughest or most tolerable regime, for it’s within each of them that liberating and enslaving forces confront one another” (1992: 4). Even in the bleakest societies of control, the conscientious effort to engage others selectively and affirmatively can release nonconforming social dispositions that, with repetition over time, may consolidate the structures of an alternate social formation. Conversely, the disposition towards control is a permanent danger for every social formation; controlling tendencies may appear at any moment as a force of association that threatens to stifle and enslave in relations of domination. This, then, is why Deleuze (1992: 4) will insist that “there is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons”. If colonial racism is a longstanding weapon of choice for the biopolitics of control, then in this essay I hope to have described excolonialism as a tool for posthuman liberation.

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