

**”Towards panspectroic competitive strategies?
A nascent diagram for corporate assemblages”**

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Abstract

In his “Postscript on control societies”, originally published in 1990, Gilles Deleuze encouraged his readers to engage in a socio-technical study of the formation of a new social diagram. Like the panopticism it usurps, the control societies diagram is, according to Deleuze, is making its mark on several institutions: The prison, the school, and – not least – the corporation.

This text will first review Deleuze's social ontology of assemblages, using it as a theoretical framework for modelling corporations. This review touches upon the connection between “assemblage theory” (as subsequently reconstructed by Manuel DeLanda) and Michel Foucault's notion of panopticism. The text then moves on to explore Deleuze's “control societies thesis”, and juxtapose it with the DeLandian notion of 'the panspectron'. This part of the text is concluded with a critique some of the specifics of Deleuze's original postscript, arguing that it is best seen as an invitation for readers to explore this nascent social diagram in greater detail.

Part two of the text situates Deleuze's control societies thesis in an assemblage theory-informed account of the rise of the modern corporation. Starting from Foucault's observations regarding the modern factory, it describes how the panoptical diagram was crucial for generating the economies of scale that allowed corporations to expand during the 20th century. Taking its cue from scholars such as Alfred D Chandler and David Noble, the historical account moves on to study how new components fed into the corporate assemblage, somewhat shifting the manner in which corporations retain their market domination. In conclusion, this historical account posits that a possible move towards a new diagram for economic organisation can be studied in terms of contemporary shifts in the components that feature in corporate assemblages.

Part three will explore recent trends in within business, outlining new modes by which the modern corporation can control markets. First, it reviews how contemporary corporations relate to immaterial property rights, studying developments within the legal arena. Secondly, it explores the emergence of corporate strategies, practices and professions aimed at gathering and managing corporate intelligence. Thirdly, it reviews the latest trend in management – how to “compete on analytics” – surveying how this chimes with notions of control societies and panspectrocinism. In each of these three cases, the text will elaborate upon how these developments can form a social diagram that – like panopticism – generates economies of scale and secures the long-term stability of corporations.

Part four of the paper entails a discussion on the similarities between the role that the panoptic diagram played, and the role that the nascent panspectrocinist diagram increasingly plays, in business: Beyond the generation of economies of scale, panspectrocinism creates a laboratory for a new science of understanding and predetermining the future behaviour of economic actors. This discussion will also highlight the close ties between organisational innovations and developments within the military and intelligence communities. The text is concluded with some considerations on how this “panspectrocinist turn” within corporate strategy relates to more general issues of surveillance in society.