

## THE FUTURE BIRTH OF THE AFFECTIVE FACT

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“The day the world changed.” We all know that means September 11, 2001. From first impact, the attacks on the World Trade Center towers were represented in the United States as an historical turning point on the scale of Pearl Harbor. For the first time since World War II the United States had been attacked on its own soil. Not only had a new war had begun, it would be a new kind of war: a “war on terror.”

Only: the phrase was already firmly established in the lexicon. Ronald Reagan was waging a war on terror back in 1986, when he invoked it as an argument for expanding US military bases abroad.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the United States *had* been attacked on its own soil. It had sustained significant casualties in 1993 when the Oklahoma City Federal Building was bombed. In that case the enemy rose up *from* American soil to attack it. The new war was old, and the enemy might also be within.

Such complications aside, the feeling that the world underwent irrevocable change on September 11, 2001 remains unshakeable. The change was perhaps less an advent than a crystallization that brought elements already in play into greater solidarity and clarity of expression around a tighter focal point. Prior to 9-11, terror was but one of a number of similarly complicated “wars” of multiple genealogies under way against ill-localized enemies. The “war on drugs” was raging on the US home front and around the world, in tandem with the perennial favorite of campaigning politicians, the “war on crime.” 9-11 catapulted the war on terror into a position of prominence. It would henceforth provide what Foucault would call the “grid of intelligibility” or “plane of reference” for political action. Paraphrasing Foucault in *La naissance de la biopolitique*, 9-11 represents the “insertion” of the threat of terror, and its flipside security, as the “phenomenal film ... constituting the sole sphere, or rather the sole surface of possible intervention, for government.” It would become the explanatory principle for all transformations, referencing an integral “refurbishing of governmental reason.”<sup>2</sup>

In this passage, the new “object” of power Foucault is referring to is not yet terrorism. But it is not far off, for reasons this paper will explore. It is “interest,” personal interest, pursued according to a principle of calculated risk. The time is not now. It is the middle of the last century. The governmental recomposition in question was not today’s neoconservatism, but its forebear neoliberalism. The reason why the object of its power, interest, is not so very far from terror is that already under classical liberalism, threat was massively politically operative. Foucault puts it bluntly: “no culture of danger, no liberalism.” The Riders of the Apocalypse may have galloped off in the Middle Ages, he explains, but their descendents made a comeback in the nineteenth century and went forth and multiplied throughout the neoliberalizing twentieth. These successors were modest “everyday dangers, perpetually stirred up, reactualized, and put into circulation.”<sup>3</sup>

Everyday fear, Foucault argues, is the correlate of neoliberal freedom. Neoliberalism defines freedom as the right of individuals to act according to their personal interest, as rationally indexed to the needs and opportunities of the market economy that sustains them. Market forces

will “naturally” coach the interplay of interests toward a peaceful coexistence in a state of dynamic equilibrium. A dynamic equilibrium is a punctuated equilibrium, appearing uncertainly between periods of crisis and haunted by their spectre. The market as a self-regulating system is metastable: it achieves provisional equilibrium, within limits and between thresholds, dogged at each step by conflicts of interests, irrationalities, and deviances, little dangers that might suddenly combine weights and tip the system into chaos.

Neoliberal governance goes hand in hand with a culture of risk. It is an art of dosages, knowing when and how much to intervene to avert accumulations of danger and sudden breaks. When action is necessary, its aim must be to recalibrate the market’s self-regulation. The key to the art is holding back. Because government intervention is itself a risk (and unlike most everyday dangers, a threat that is directly systemic) the most important thing a government can know is when *not* to act. Given the self-organizing complexity of the system, regulation can just as easily unbalance the natural play of interests as calibrate them.

There is one thing, Foucault says, that one never asks a neoliberal government: true or false?<sup>4</sup> The right question is: how are things going? Are they running smoothly? Neoliberalism’s rationality is no longer truth seeking or inculcating. It operates according to a calculus of the minimal act. Its rationality is at once pragmatic and speculative: *pragmatic* because with a complex system it is always in the end a question of trial and error; *speculative* because whether the trials are errors is a matter of educated guesswork until the system has worked through the perturbation and given *its* judgment on it, in the form of increased stability or a destabilization. Right is what works to keep things running. What works runs on its own. The value of an act of governance is in the future tense. It is known only after all is said and done, as expressed by the system itself -- and not as a proposition but as a condition of health. Rather than stated it is instantiated, in a manifestation of strength.

The outcome is read in the indicators. Correctness is not deduced from first principle, it is diagnosed. In any case, correctness is not the goal. The goal is success, and success is strength. Whatever amplifies an individual’s productive powers eventually settles into a reinforcing systemic adjustment, through a higher-equilibrium seeking multiplier-effect contributing to the health of the economy. Whatever amplifies an individual’s productive powers is thus an economic factor. Considering that doses of rest and entertainment are necessary to maintain productivity, and that everything from educating to eating to caring to clothing help increase it, whatever an individual does in life becomes an economic factor. The system runs on life capital, “human capital.”<sup>5</sup>

This form of capital is unqualified. It is *whatever-activity*, measured not in labor-time but in life-time. Productive powers shade into powers of existence. Production is no longer defined as “work” in the nineteenth-century dynamics sense of a local motive force applied to an object. Productive powers are now growth factors, powers to be, becoming. They are as illocalized as the ever-present enemy in the culture of danger, defined temporally with indistinction as to their object. To be and to become, as capital and for it: life-time, capital-time; time of growth, time for fear.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond true and false, neoliberal governance seeks to practice a pragmatics of the minimal act whose greatest success would be to ensure the health and well-being of the capitalist system and

its individual elements without doing anything itself. Neo-liberal rationality, at the limit, is a pragmatics of *not-doing* in the interests of the *whatever-activity* of an autonomously self-organizing system powered by individual bodies' market-driven, and market-driving, powers of existence, as productive in rest as at work. It is one of Foucault's basic lessons that every mode of power is imbricated with a mode of knowledge. Neoliberalism's mode of knowledge is speculatively pragmatic. Its mode of power is *metabolic*. Its "interest," its "object," is ultimately the safeguarding of unqualified activity, not as a motive force but as a self-regenerating *ontogenetic* force -- a power productive of more for the being, in the future; a making of being a becoming.

Neoliberal governance acts *around* the autonomous activity of a process. It acts peripherally, then observes collaterally to assess the damage or benefit of its actions. Its novelty, in taking interest as its "object," is to have invented a mode of power that in fact has no object. What it has is pragmatic adjacency to a *process*. Having no object as such, it does not constitute itself as a subject of knowledge. It knows only consequentially, by reading the indicators for collateral damage. Its knowing is perpetually deferred into indications for the future, the meaning of which only the unfolding of the process will tell. The process is object and subject of its own unfolding. The healthier the unfolding, the more peripheral governing becomes. The strength of the economy's rolling-forward exerts a centrifugal force throwing governance into outer orbit. The more successful government policy is, the farther it moves toward the longed-for horizon of non-doing.

This movement prompts Foucault at a certain point in *La naissance de la biopolitique* to suspend his usual vocabulary of objects of power and subjects of knowledge, momentarily replacing it with with the anobjective, asubjective "machine-flow" vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.<sup>7</sup> The "machine" is the set of speculative procedures put into practice. The flow is the ongoing of the economy -- material in its self-positing independent of a subject of knowledge, but ideal in being both continuous and infinitely divisible, passing between the status of the objective whole and empirical parts like water through a seive. Neoliberalism locates itself in adjacency to an ideal materiality of process.<sup>8</sup> Of course the flow which has become the object of power has always already undergone policy intervention. This does not challenge its autonomy, because the process folds interventions into its future unfoldings, incorporating their perturbations into its own operations.

The process is the coupling of the machining and the flowing in an infolding and unfolding that maintains both the autonomy of the process and the externality of governing action, holding them in a dynamic relation of non-relation Deleuze and Guattari call "reciprocal presupposition." The machine-flow coupling, because it processually combines local acts with nonlocal dangers and freedoms and with infinitely continuous and divisible powers of production, cannot be termed a "space," in the sense in which Foucault normally uses the term, as a stabilizable "grid" of reference for regularized intervention. Foucault is led to supplement his usual vocabulary again, speaking of an "environment" of life where he would normally tend to say a "space" of power. "Governmentality" is now "environmentality."<sup>9</sup>

The economic environment is the *open field* holding the reciprocal outsides of government action and the ideal materiality of economic flow together in the same process. A field that is "indefinitely" open, continuously turning in and out on itself as it divides toward a future in

which it will be the one it is, but different (more what it was) – this is not a griddable *space*. It is a growth *process*. The field *is* the process. It is the economic process, and the economic process subsumes all of life-time. Its growth politics is metabolic and concerns adaptively self-intensifying powers of existence. It is a politics of life.<sup>10</sup> Foucault clearly specifies that neoliberal biopolitics are beyond disciplinarity.<sup>11</sup> The object of disciplinary power was the multiplicity of human bodies, which it was the duty of the liberal-disciplinary regime to individualize. This object has been replaced by an open field of environmentality the whole of which is never fully individualized into parts, and whose duty is to continue, to keep on keep on running, carrying itself to ever higher powers.

The rationality of neoliberalism is thus not a conformal truth deducible from first principles (as were the foundational truths of sovereign power). Neither is it a normative law arrived at by induction (as in the liberal-disciplinary regime of biopolitical power).<sup>12</sup> As in inductive inquiry, projections may be derived from statistical analyses of the past that describe trends in the present that will ostensibly hold through the present into the future following a linear progression. But the mood has changed. It may be *hoped* that the future can be induced as a linear extension from the past, it is *feared* that it may not. With the changeability in mood comes a shift in mode, from descriptive or denotative to the *indexical*. Economic indexes, or indicators, are notoriously fallible. There is always an “if,” since they indicate trends rather than grounding laws. An indicated trend will eventuate *if* certain conditions hold, in particular investor and consumer *confidence*. If future conditions remain grounded in economic principles as currently understood – overall, this means governed by rational self-interest venturing calculated risks -- the systemic response to whatever corrective measures are undertaken following the guideline of minimal governance should be more or less predictable. The big “if,” the fallibility factor, is fear. If consumer and investor confidence is spooked, all bets are off. An affective uncertainty insinuates itself into the core operations of the speculative system on the coattails of threat. An ineradicable margin of doubt enters the picture: the threat of uncorrectable imbalances, or of perturbations too powerful to be folded back into adaptive systemic modulations. Among the first articulated responses to 9-11 from public official were exhortations to the public from government officials to *keep shopping*. Before anything like a “grid of intelligibility” was found for the event -- before it was placeable in a geopolitical context, before it was categorized as an act of war (as opposed to a crime or an act of madness or protest) -- it was reacted to as a generic threat of economic disruption. The most immediately articulable response, amid the horror of first impact, was the fear that the attack would lower public confidence to the point that a recession would trigger.

The hope that confidence will be restored, and the fear that it won't, shifts the center of gravity of economic reasoning from the past-present axis describing trends whose arc will continue more or less predictably into the future, onto a present-future axis wobbling with uncertainty, trembling in anticipation of fear.

Indicators do not have truth-value, or even knowledge-value per se. What they have ultimately is affectively inflected uncertainty-value. They quantify the hope -- and imply the fear. If it all shakes out, the positive production of economic value will be snatched from the jaws of whatever threats might throw themselves at the system. Uncertainty will be translated into more growth. Confidence will be restored. Practical measures can be taken to facilitate this translation. But to be successful, they will have to *act on the future* because they must respond to threat, and threat is in an indefinite future tense: what may yet come. The political axis must shift to acting on, in

the words of President Bush, “eventualities that may or may not occur.” As Bush concisely summed it up, “I think we agree, the past is over.” “I have made good judgments in the future.”<sup>13</sup>

In agreeing to act on the future, government is agreeing to *act on time*. The linear time-structure shared by common-sense and traditional governmental reason limits action to the present with the aim of generating effects that will reverberate in the future. Responding to threat requires the time of government to be politically corrected. In the traditional schema, the present is where the past shades into the future. Movements from the past are in the present as a momentum passing through to the road ahead. Their passing through describes a trend expected to continue. In explanatory frameworks, the present is more a dissolve between the past and the future than a separate moment or a simple point in time. To act on the future, the first thing that has to be done is to sidestep or suspend this blurry present. The full quote just cited was: “I have made judgments in the past. I have made judgments in the future.” The past and future of decision are in immediate juxtaposition. What Bush skips is the *decisionmaking*. He is not one to admit to thinking things over. Deliberation is what Democrats do. In the current American lexicon, it’s called waffling and is perceived as a sign less of wisdom than of weakness. “Verbosity,” Bush succinctly observes, “leads to unclear, inarticulate things.” His 2000 Democratic electoral rival, Al Gore, was verbose. He spoke in full sentences and read books. “The fact that he relies on facts -- says things that are not factual -- are going to undermine his campaign,” Bush correctly predicted. To admit to discussing, studying, consulting, analyzing is to admit to having been in a state of indecision preceding the making of the decision. It is to admit to passages of doubt and unclarity in a blurry present. It is the blurriness that will continue as a trend into the future. Once you start trucking with facts, it will most likely lead straight to error. Bush agrees instinctively with his political forebear Ronald Reagan that “facts are stupid things.”

A trustable decision is not made in any dangerously deliberative way. A confident decision strikes like lightning. It *happens*. It is a counter-event to the event to which it responds, and inhabits the same temporal dimension of the before-after. A lightning decision is unwaveringly right. Right is what “stays the course” with confidence. If there is a notion of truth here it is, again, pragmatically speculative, with a new twist. It is pragmatic because the judge of the decision’s value are its consequences. It is speculative because its action is meant to be on the future. What’s new about it is that the consequences that determine the decision’s correctness are directly affective rather than factual.

Bush’s thunderbolt approach to political decision has been a source of wonder to aficionados of fact, who in White House parlance are disdainfully referred to collectively as the “reality-based community.” According to investigative journalist Bob Woodward, “at no time did the president sit down with his war cabinet and discuss”<sup>14</sup> the merits of an invasion of Iraq. Secretary of State Colin Powell was advised of the decision months later, in January of 2003. “The whole conversation took twelve minutes. That was what passed for debate in the Bush war cabinet.”<sup>15</sup> The infamous Downing Street memo reporting to Blair Bush’s characteristic “fixing” of the facts indicates it had been made by the summer of 2002.<sup>16</sup> Woodward sees signs that it was a certainty as early as November 2001. The time form of the decision that strikes like lightning is the foregone conclusion. When it arrives, it always seems to have preceded itself. Where there is a sign of it, it has always already hit. Donald Rumsfeld:



“I think what you’ll find, I think what you’ll find is, whatever it is we do substantively, there will be near-perfect clarity as to what it is. And it will be known, and it will be known to Congress, and it will be known to you, *probably before we decide it*, but it will be known.”<sup>17</sup>

A confident decision is one that just happens. It self-effects, without any apparent personal act of will by the ostensible maker of the decision. The subject of the decision is more in circumstantial adjacency to it than at its origination. Otherwise, the decision would be marked by the human weakness of its maker. It comes in the mode of having always been already, even before it has, eliding the present of its making. It preempts the time of its making with the strike of its event. It is immediately future-past. Confident decisionmaking, or what I will call *command power* in honor of Bush’s favorite characterization of his presidential role, that of commander-in-chief, shares the before-after structure of the event. But it is a preemptive event that is not content to juxtapose the before and after, but contrives to overlay them.<sup>18</sup> It is this overlay that presently strikes. The before-after seizes the moment. The future-past colonizes the present.

The traditional tense of threat, the indefinite future of the what-may-come, has been translated into the future perfect: the “will have” of the always-will-have-been-already. The French term, “futur antérieur,” says it well. The future anterior is the time of certainty. It is the temporal equivalent of a tautology – which is precisely the form of governmental logic that expresses it: the foregone conclusion. A time-slip evacuates the suspended present, and with it deliberative reason. Analysis, decision, and debate are shortcircuited. The baby of persuasive speech goes out with the discursively reasoning bathwater. What replaces persuasion is the presumption of allegiance. The “always will have already been *patriotic*” is the future anterior of political persuasion. When the transitional present of deliberation and persuasion go, so does the political narration dedicated to describing significant transitions. The fact-checked or rationally coherent narration of the past moving through the present in trend-obeying or law-abiding fashion ceases to compel -- so ceases to be practiced as a rule. Logico-discursive reasoning is shortcircuited, in all its modes, deliberative, persuasive, narrative and lawful. This phenomenon is popularly called “Bushspeak.” Exhibiting it has become a minor publishing and video industry.

Paradoxically, what began as a move to recenter political action on a present-future axis in order to act directly on the future has ended up overlaying the future on the past, and this overlay has spectacularly superseded the blurry present, flooding it with the lightning brightness of the foregone conclusion that strikes with the steely certainty of tautology. As any reader of speculative fiction knows, alterations in the time-line always entail paradoxes. The political present is now haunted by the paradox of command. Government has had to learn how to work with the paradox and profit from its political efficacy. It was a fast learning curve. By the time the dust of the Twin Towers had settled, it was as if it had always already known. What it will have known then is to operate effectively according a reason that is no longer logico-discursive. And to have taken as the privileged object of its power (which is not one) not rational interest but *affect*. And to have shifted its mode of intervention from corrective perturbation responding to chaotic stirrings to *alarm* in response to threat.

The overall environment becomes one that can no longer be characterized as neoliberalism, and comprises a very different ecology of regimes of power. In particular, it is given to sudden flashes of what Agamben calls sovereign power, coming as if out of nowhere. They come as if from nowhere because they come in the time-slip of the future-anterior. The paradox of lightning

decision, or command power as I have been describing it, is homologous to the paradox of sovereignty as Agamben analyzes it: pure, self-preceding decision.<sup>19</sup> What has changed in the ecology of power is the degree to which the pure decision of command stalks the political present. It always and everywhere ready to strike. It is important to note that this “sovereign” power of command is not a power of decision held by an individual. It is pure in the sense of self-effecting, like a machine that automatically cuts into the flow of individuals’ lives. It has the ideality of an event, yet effects itself materially. It is also important to remark that overall the system of power reverts to a sovereign regime. Rather, command joins disciplinary and biopolitical modes of power in complex interaction in a shared environment characterized overall by no one of these modes. The ready recourse to exercises of command power is one of the distinguishing characteristics of neoconservatism, and marks its difference from neoliberalism. However, the recentering on affect associated with the regained virulence of command power also occurs in relation to the other other modes of power. Overall, the interaction of the modes of power in play are dedicated to managing threat to ensure *security*, for which there is no objective measure, any more than there is of a mood.

Where confidence-building was once in the service of growth, security now becomes an end in itself. The assurance of security now potentially rivals the maximization of productive capacities as the finality of governance. The tautological sterility of the pure, self-preceding decision now potentially rivals the ontogenetic fecundity of the autonomously self-propelling machine-flow process. It is this tension between continued growth and becoming in the open neoliberal field of the capitalist system, and the sovereign closure of the foregone event – also known as *preemption* -- that most adequately characterizes neoconservatism. I would argue that it more suggestively diagnoses its nature as a regime of power than such macro-level concepts as Empire, globalization, and postnationality (because it diagnoses it directly processually rather than by assigning it a general category).

The breakdown of logico-discursive reasoning and the accompanying decline of the empirical fact does not of course mean that there is no longer any logic – or any facts. There is a tautological logic that tends to prevail, and a new order of facts associated with it emerges. We have witnessed the birth of the *affective fact* as a key political operator. An affective mechanism earns the moniker “fact” by exhibiting the certainty to which empirical facts aspire when they are not just being stupid. The two orders of fact overlap in their pretension to certainty, which is actually far more trustably achieved by affective facts than empirical ones due to the tautological logic they share with pure decision or command. As well as overlapping with the traditional family of facts, affective facts overlap with command by logic by homology with it. The central political significance of affect rests on these overlaps, because they enable a slippage between the orders they bring into contact. Affect is not just one mechanism among others. It is *component of passage* between mechanisms, orders of phenomena, and modes of power. It is not central in the sense of a first principle or a determination in the last instance. It central by dint of being interstitial. A passage across the overlaps effects a gear-shifting between registers. A pause in the passage allows a co-functioning of formally distinct processes. Affect is an effective mechanism of operational linkage. This a role formerly fulfilled (at least mythically) by logico-discursive reason in the public sphere of deliberation and debate. In the security sphere, it can no longer pretend to that office. Neither can command power take over that role. As an abstract machine of decision it tends to separate itself from other registers. It is self-purifying. Affect, on the other hand, is agglutinative.<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason that affect comes to the fore politically under

neoconservatism. As was already the case under the human-capital regime of neoliberalism, there is no sustainable separation between spheres. They are all woven into the economy, making a directly economic mode of power the motor of the process as a whole: the ontogenetic power productive of becoming, as described earlier. Affect, as a mechanism of linkage or a component of passage, is in a position to play an increasingly crucial role.

So what is an affective fact? The mechanism is quite simple:  
Threat triggers fear. The fear is of disruption. The fear *is* a disruption.

The mechanism is a capacity that affect itself has to self-effect. Paradoxically, as with command, its self-effecting produces certainty, even when the trigger is the opposite, the looming uncertainty of ill-defined threat. You're not left cringing, wondering what may come. As soon as there is any sign of threat, its most feared effects have already begun to materialize. If an elaborate security apparatus has already been put in place, drawing the state-of-the-art in disciplinary and biopolitical response, the nascent disruption can be nipped in the bud. The repercussions of the feared event have been controlled. The event has been preempted. Preemption is not prevention. Prevention corresponds to neoliberal Cold War politics. Preemption does not prevent, it effects. It induces the event, *in effect*. Rather than acting in the present to avoid an occurrence in the future, preemption brings the future into the present. It makes present the future consequences of an eventuality that may or may not occur, indifferent to its actual occurrence. The event's consequences precede it, as if it had already occurred. The event remains virtual – future-past -- but is real and present in its effects. The present reality of its effects mean that it can be responded to pragmatically all the while remaining virtual.

The best way for governmental action to get a handle on threat is to be ready for it by directing where its effects will be felt. This is the function of the *alarm*. The alarm signals the threat, triggering fear. This induces the affective time-slip that is of a piece with preemption. Governmental intervention in the security sphere is no longer corrective, but inductive -- this time in the sense of *inducing* the event it to which it responds. The emission of signs of alarm become its instrument of choice.

Signing threat to induce fear to control its effects snatches certainty from the jaws of uncertainty. The security equivalent of the logical tautology is the certainty of the affectively self-fulfilling prophesy, falling on secured ground.

In a way, the more uncertainty the better. To paraphrase Foucault, no culture of fear, no neoconservatism. Neoliberalism's human capital was already on edge, due to the ever-presence of little dangers. The economic system was already perceived as fundamentally chaotic, at best metastable, forever teetering on the brink of crisis. What has changed post 9-11 and with the consolidation of neoconservatism is that the system is not only perceived as chaotic. The jitteriness is understandable if you consider again that the semiotics of neoliberal decisionmaking hinged on the indexicality of the economic indicator. The basic example of the indexical sign is the connection between smoke and fire. Economic indicators are asking for faith in a connection between smoke in the present and future fire. They already conceal the time paradox that comes out so baldly later on, because they function as time-inverted indexes, where the smoke is predictive of fires to come. Except now, with preemption, it doesn't predict them, it causes them. It is like watching footage of a fire in reverse: there *will* have been fire, in effect, because there is



now smoke. But what if it's fog? And what if the fog is a cloud of white powder ... quick, close the airport! The airport must be closed just in case, to assuage the fear. The closure of the airport induces fear. Men in white decontamination suits descend. Police swarm in for crowd control. Far-flung airports with originating flights due to land are affected. The media amplify the alarm in real-time with live news bulletins. The fear of the disruption has become the disruption.

A day later, the white powder has been identified. It was flour. No one is annoyed. Their confidence has been restored by the response. Had it been anthrax, it would have been under control, because as everyone saw with their own eyes, everything was under control when it wasn't. Preemption not only suspends the place of the present in the traditional time-line, it neutralizes the identity of any exemplary object or individual that may be intimately linked to the feared event. Like the event itself, the empirical objects and subjects associated with the threat are struck by a certain indeterminacy. The event is an eventuality that may or may not occur, but does nevertheless in effect. The author of the threat is a subject who may or may not be identifiable, or even exist, yet who nevertheless is an effective social actor. And the object taken as symbolic of the threat may or may not be what it is, but is just as implicated in the response regardless. The subject and object of the threat are generic in their identity – Virilio's "whatever-enemy" virtually handling Deleuze's "whatever-object." Although generic as to identity and uncertain in their existence, they share a definite *quality*: they are threatening.<sup>21</sup> This is an affective quality. It can easily function as a component of passage.

The incident I am describing occurred at the Montreal airport in the beginning of May 2005. In the follow-up reporting, the incident was always referred to as a "toxic substance alert."<sup>22</sup> It was never to my knowledge called a "flour alert." The sign of alarm emitted by the government *names* the event. The name identifies the type of danger, giving the affect associated with the eventuality a specific threatening quality. This affective quality – the jitters associated with toxicity – not only applies to the event as a whole, but to all the elements that may or may not enter into it. The quality of the feared object, the object that may or may not be, the *possible* object of danger, is brought forward into the present from its roost in futurity. It passes from possible anthrax into empirically present flour. Flour no longer has the conviviality of cake. It sets the affective tone of the present moment. Toxicity jitters infuse it, and peruse its environment. The fear is enveloped in the empirical object, regardless of what it actually is, and at the same time envelops it, becoming an environmental condition, like a mood or the weather. The identity of the *possible* object determines the affective quality of the *actual* situation. And that's a fact. Its quality has actualized, without the object itself materializing. It has taken affective passage from the future to the present, on the coattails of the time-inverse sign of alarm.

If the sign of alarm is an index, in Peircean terms the quality of the possible object that takes passage to infuse and peruse is its "immediate object." The jitters the alarm induces is its "dynamical object." The interpretant is not the subject who has the jitters – it is a persistent error in readings of Peirce to subjectify the interpretant. The interpretant is rather the actual actions following from the appearance of the immediate object.<sup>23</sup> In other words, it is the collective response to the jitters – the actions taken by any number of embodied actors in the environment, in conformity with the mood of the situation. If there is a subject of the sign on the receiving end, it is the *security apparatus*. The addressee is just as impersonally machinic as the self-effecting event. And it is this event that must be seen as the subject of the sign on the sending side. The actual embodied actors who send the sign of alarm are merely playing a catalytic role. They are

tripping the process into operation. They merely induce the self-effecting of the process, from a position of adjacency to it. Like the responding bodies who dynamically interpret the future meaning of the sign in the present situation, they are not subjects of the sign or its process. They are what Peirce calls the *partial objects* of the semiotic event.<sup>24</sup> “Neither an utterer nor even, perhaps, an interpreter is essential to the sign,” he writes.<sup>25</sup> Utterer and interpreter may remain virtual. “It is undeniably conceivable that a beginningless series of successive utterers should all do their work in a brief interval of time, and that so should an endless series of of interpreters.”<sup>26</sup> The brief interval that can contain a beginningless and endless series is *the* briefest. It is briefer than the briefest perceivable, too fleet ever to be present. The subject of the process, in both its aspects as sender and receiver, or sign event and dynamical response, inhabits this sub-present interval, in the instantaneous serialization of *partial subjects* of enunciation. The overall subject is their instantaneous summation of their work. The self-effecting event and foregone conclusion expressed through the process seem to come of out of nowhere and transcend linear time because their subject is *infra*-temporal. The virtual subject or subjects of the process are immanent to it. They are aspects of its really abstract, or ideally material, motor. Even “sovereign” command power is a power of immanence.

The affective fact induced by the indexical sign of alarm is that there was in effect a danger, as certainly as there was an alert. Given that the suspension of logico-discursive reasoning suspends narration, the affective fact easily consolidates into something that is taken for and functions as an empirical fact. Because the incident continues to be called a toxic-substance alert, and in the absence of narrative anchoring, the actual unfolding of the event starts to fade from memory. After enough repetitions of the name, it is easy to conclude that there was, in empirical fact, the presence of anthrax at the airport. The Bush administration systematically practices the semiotics of alarm in order to exploit the way affect can operate as a shifter or component of passage between affective fact and empirical fact. According to one commentator on Bushspeak, the Bush administration argue “mainly by repeating the charge, rather than revealing the proof.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, repetition of a warning, or even its name, can be enough to effect the passage to empirical fact. It is by force of repetition of the charge that the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq became a fact for the vast majority of Americans, in the lead-up to the war and throughout at least its first year. This affectively born fact was central to the legitimation of the administration’s lightning decision to invade. Under neoconservatism, the semiotics of indexicality, in operative coupling with an ontology of virtuality, legitimate governmental action. The foregoneness of the conclusion means that government decision never has to worry about being in error. The affective fact is that they have always already been right.

It is facile to accuse Bush of stupidity, and his administration of factual deception. The reality is much more complex – and far more frightening – than that. What has been described here is not a simple lack of logic or thick-skulled misrecognition of the facts. Quite the contrary, it is a positive *thinking machine* effectively producing its own facts of affective passage by the way in which its beginningless and endless series of partial subjects and partial objects caught up in the self-effecting of the event dynamically interpret its signs.

Bush grasped the collective nature of the subject of the enunciation of security power: “Actually, I -- this may sound a little West Texan to you, but I like it -- when I'm talking about -- when I'm talking about myself, and when he's talking about myself, all of us are talking about me.”

Security is the new political me. The process becomes us.<sup>28</sup> If the process is a thinking machine, we are its embodied thoughts. The actual experiential contents of our lives are its pragmatic speculations.

It is a defining characteristic of neoconservatism to cast this machinic subjection as freedom. As Bush reminded us in his address to the American people on the anniversary of “sovereignty” in Iraq, security is freedom.<sup>29</sup>

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Foreign Bases Urged for War on Terror,” *The Washington Post*, 19 September 1986, page A22.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France 1978-1979* (Paris : Gallimard / Seuil, 2004), pages 48, 298.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, page 68. On everyday fear, see Brian Massumi, *The Politics of Everyday Fear* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, page 94.

<sup>5</sup> For Foucault’s analysis of human capital in neoliberal theory, see *La naissance de la biopolitique*, pages 225-239. “The economy is no longer the analysis of a process, but of an activity ... the analysis of an internal rationality, of the strategic programming of individuals’ activities (229) ... the elements which enter into the constitution of a quantity of human capital are much broader and more numerous than simply school learning or professional training ... the time dedicated by parent to child-care and giving affection to their children must be analyzable as an investment able to constitute a human capital. Time spent, care given ... all of the cultural stimuli received by the child: all of it will constitute elements formative of a quantity of human capital ... (235-236).”

<sup>6</sup> On capital-time as life-time, see Eric Alliez and Michel Feher, “The Luster of Capital,” *Zone*, no. 1 / 2 (1987), pages 314-359 and Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: How the Shift from Ownership to Access is Transforming Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pages 96-133.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, pages 230-232.

<sup>8</sup> On flow as ideal materiality, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane, forward by Michel Foucault (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pages 36-38. On the machine-flow model generally, see pages 1-50. The speculative nature, and ultimately ideal reality, of the object of power is an essential component of Foucault’s thought, and actually characterizes all “positive” or productive regimes of power. His descriptions of governmentality in *La naissance de la biopolitique* leave the impression that neoliberalism does not represent a change in the metaphysical status of the object of power, but rather marks a threshold of its becoming-apparent. It is under neoliberalism that its status becomes explicit (which explains the uncanny feeling the reader sometimes has that Foucault’s descriptions of neoliberalism are describing his own theory of power). In the final passages of volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault emphasizes that even in the liberal-disciplinary regime of normalization the object of power is an ideal limit-point of convergence toward which the strategies of the apparatuses of power tend, but can never reach without losing their function (like true north for the compass needle). The object of power is realized, projectively, by the reaching. Foucault returns to this thought at the beginning of *La naissance de la biopolitique*, where he asserts that practices of power “make what does not exist become something, a something which continues not to exist ... an apparatus of power-knowledge effectively marks in the real what does not exist ... [this is not a question] either of errors, illusions, or ideologies. This is a something that does not exist, yet is inscribed in the real” (pages 21-22; emphasis added). The objective center around which a regime of power arrays itself is always virtual (real and ideal; the ideal materiality of *Anti-Oedipus*). Foucault cites as examples the apparatuses of power-knowledge to which his major studies were dedicated: madness, delinquency, sexuality. This is how Foucault speaks of *virtual object* “sex” as the biopolitical object of power for the apparatus of “sexuality” at the end of volume 1 *The History of Sexuality*: “Sex ... is doubtless but an ideal point made necessary by the apparatus of sexuality and its functioning. ... sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element [Deleuze and Guattari would say ‘immanent’] in an apparatus of sexuality,” *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), page 155 (translation modified). He goes on to explain that both sex and sexuality are real, in different ways. He also uses the term “*natural quasi-object*” to mark this mode of reality (*La naissance de la biopolitique*, page 78). On

alternative politics involving a reaching-toward the virtual, see Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> “No longer hierarchizing, identificatory, uniformity-producing individualization, but rather an environmentality open to contingency and transversal phenomena,” Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, page 266. See also pages 236, 263-264.

<sup>10</sup> On neoliberalism as a politics of life, or *Vitalpolitik*, see Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, pages 153-154, 248.

<sup>11</sup> “A massive step back from the normative-disciplinary system ... and an individualizing ‘governmentality’ comprising: disciplinary gridding, indefinite regulation, and subordination/classification according to norm,” Foucault, *La naissance de la biopolitique*, page 277.

<sup>12</sup> On the norm as the inductive result of the deployment of biopolitical apparatuses of power-knowledge, see *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* (Paris : Gallimard / Seuil, 2004), pages 58-59. Foucault terms the process of inductively producing a norm as the outcome of an exercise of biopolitical power “normation” as opposed to “normalization” (the prescriptive imposition of a division between the normal and the abnormal according to a preestablished principle of judgment).

<sup>13</sup> All Bush quotes from Slate.com.

<sup>14</sup> Evan Thomas, “ ‘I Haven’t Suffered Doubt’ ,” *Time Magazine*, 20 April 2004, page 22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pages 269-274.

<sup>16</sup> “Bush and Blair Deny ‘Fixed’ Iraq Reports,” *New York Times*, 8 June 2005, page A7.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, 28 February 2003 DoD briefing (source: Slate <http://slate.msn.com/id/2081042>, quoting DoD website)

<sup>18</sup> On the future-past as the time of the event, see Gilles Deleuze, “Aiôn,” *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pages 162-168.

<sup>19</sup> On the self-preceding of the State as pure decision, See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pages 217-221 (“Urstaat”); along similar lines, on the paradox of sovereignty, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pages 15-29. For a discussion of “command” power and biopower in its earlier Clinton administration incarnation, see Brian Massumi, “Requiem for Our Prospective Dead (Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalist Power),” *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998), pages 40-64; for a discussion of the Urstaat in relation to the Reagan administration, see Brian Massumi and Kenneth Dean, *First and Last Emperors: The Body of the Despot and the Absolute State* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> On affect as “world-glue,” see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pages 208-218.

<sup>21</sup> On the generic in its political functioning, see Massumi, “Requiem,” pages 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, “ADM soutient que la sécurité des passagers a été améliorée,” *La Presse* (Montreal), 10 mai 2005, page A7 (in particular the photo and caption).

<sup>23</sup> See for example, C. S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 2, ed. The Peirce Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), page 498.

<sup>24</sup> *Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, 408.

<sup>25</sup> *Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, 404.

<sup>26</sup> *Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, 403.

<sup>27</sup> David Corn, *The Lies of George Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception* (New York: Crown, 2003), 208.

<sup>28</sup> On fear as subjectivizing, see Massumi, “Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear,” *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), pages 3-38.

<sup>29</sup> George W. Bush, address to the nation, 28 June 2005.