



**ANTHROPOLOGY
of the CONTEMPORARY
RESEARCH
COLLABORATORY**

**CARLO CADUFF
PAUL RABINOW**

**SECURITY, TERRITORY,
POPULATION**

**2007
concept note**

no.8

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH COLLABORATORY (ARC) AIMS TO DEVELOP NEW TECHNIQUES OF COLLABORATION, MODES OF COMMUNICATION AND TOOLS OF INQUIRY FOR THE HUMAN SCIENCES. AT ARC'S CORE ARE COLLABORATIONS ON SHARED PROBLEMS AND CONCEPTS, INITIALLY FOCUSING ON SECURITY, BIOPOLITICS, AND THE LIFE SCIENCES, AND THE NEW FORMS OF INQUIRY.

WWW.ANTHROPOS-LAB.NET

Suggested Citation: Caduff, Carlo and Rabinow, Paul. "Security, Territory, Population," *ARC Concept Note*, No. 8, 2007.

Copyright: © 2007 ARC

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>



Security, Territory, Population

Carlo Caduff and Paul Rabinow

Although Michel Foucault's course of 1977-78 at the *Collège de France* – “*Sécurité, Territoire, Population*” – is best known for its introduction and initial elaboration of the concept of “governmentality,” the course's first three lectures contain an enthralling discussion of the terms “population” and “security.”¹ Consistent with his genealogical method of specifying sites of emergence, Foucault suspends his analysis at the end of the eighteenth century. Hence, as is his habitual want, he provides the genealogical elements for a history of the present but not for the further elaboration and inquiry that would be required for an anthropology of the contemporary. The same criteria apply to the scintillating few pages where Foucault sketches out a re-interpretation of his own prior analysis (from the 1966 *Les Mots et Les Choses*) of the emergence of Man (*l'homme*) at the turn of the nineteenth century. By so doing, he provides a means by which the question of the current formation of **anthropos**, the “human thing” can be re-opened, yet once again.

Inherently interesting in-and-of-themselves, the lectures provide trenchant, if only partially adequate, tools for orientation within our contemporary situation. For current purposes of constructing a conceptual inventory therefore it is sufficient to present here a minimalist schematization of Foucault's concept of “security.” This schematization will be helpful in identifying elements of what might well be an emergent contemporary apparatus of “biosecurity.” Using Foucault's analytic in this manner enables one to “enter into” (to use a term of Niklas Luhmann), the amorphous contemporary and begin to explore and organize it.

First Lecture

In the opening lecture on January 11, 1978, Foucault, following his customary practice, lays out a set of clear, if preliminary, distinctions (common places) that identify the elements of a “**security**” (*la sécurité*) apparatus (*dispositif*). Using these commonplaces, Foucault then proceeds to lay out a discursive field of possibilities by drawing contrasts (again preliminary) between a previously well-studied example of an apparatus (discipline) and a new one (security). As he had demonstrated one year earlier in *Discipline and Punish*, discipline is a

¹ Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population : Cours au Collège de France, 1977-78*, Paris : Hautes Etudes, Seuil/Gallimard, 2004. Jan 11, 1978. The material on ‘territory’ is less developed.

² For more on this distinction see Paul Rabinow, *French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory*, “Epilogue.”

technology built to isolate, distribute, fix, and control. Security, in contrast, is a technology that observes, modulates, and regulates. Discipline begins its operations by intervening in a situation while security only intervenes as a last resort and after observation and evaluation of the specific tendencies of a given situation. Discipline aims at a totally controlled environment. Security works on a pre-existing milieu that it seeks to modulate.

Foucault takes this schema and applies it in different ways. He first addresses the question of which objects each apparatus is designed to take-up and to work-over. **Sovereign** operates on a territory. **Discipline** operates on **individuals**. **Security** operates on a **population**.³ That being said, each of the technologies must also take into account, albeit in a dependant manner, the other two variables (hence the title of the course). Thus, for example, while the main target of disciplinary technology is individuals, it operates within a space (part of a territory) that it seeks to isolate out and to homogenize. Within such a space individuals are distributed, fixed and observed but only after they have been extracted from an existing multitude (population). By definition, a space of security, as opposed to one of discipline, is neither an empty space nor is it worked-over in order to produce uniformity. Rather, a space of security is one that contains heterogeneous material givens (both natural and social) that must be taken-up operationally in accordance with their own inherent qualities (thus preserving specificity of difference). A security apparatus does not seek to totally refashion these givens, rather it operates with a rationality of maximization of positive elements and minimization of negative elements. To arrive at a point where such maximization and minimization can be comprehended, knowledge of the material givens must be constantly accumulated and put under evaluation. Thus, in a security apparatus, its elements, these material givens, are the target of **modulation** not total reformulation.⁴ Security is always in motion. Its traditional goal, after all, is the best possible circulation of goods, things, people.

While discipline works on the **present** to shape a controlled, stabilized future, security does not aim at **future** developments that are fully controllable or regular but are capable of a degree of re-direction and re-formulation. One way that it does this partial work is to be attentive to the history and specifics of individual elements, apparatuses and assemblages. Hence, deploying the logic of total control of a *tabula rasa*, as in discipline, would be inappropriate and counter-productive because it would disrupt surveillance, denature processes that can not be totally brought under control, and adopt a radically different subject position. Finally, a security apparatus takes up the problem of how to

³ P.13. This example is discussed at more length in my *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

⁴ P.21.

manage an indefinite series of elements that are in motion. This motion is understood within a logic of **probable events**. As Foucault, Ian Hacking and others, have shown, statistics and probability were quickly articulated as aspects of a new art of state governmentality in the seventeenth century. The new mathematics can be seen as a corollary of a changing mode of attention to things. To understand an event set within a probability series, requires the development of means of observation attuned to the previous configurations (of these elements and series and their recombinations), their present state, as well as their potential reconfiguration.

The general name given to the space of security, the site of this probability inflected series of events, is the **milieu**. A milieu is both the environment within which actions take place and the material on which action operates. **The milieu is the dynamic ensemble of historically interwoven natural givens and artificial givens.** A security apparatus must identify and intervene: “precisely there at the point where there is an interference between a series of events produced by individuals, groups and populations and the series of events of a quasi-natural type that are produced around them.” Within the milieu there is a cybernetics of cause and effects. Said another way, the milieu is the sum of a certain number of ‘*effets de masse*’ weighing on those who inhabit it and seek to shape it. By definition, a milieu is dynamic and reflexively transformative. Foucault concludes this lecture with the **extravagant** and exhilarating claim: it is within the rationality of the milieu as a target of a security apparatus, that the “naturalness” of the human species makes its appearance (see below).

Second Lecture

In the second lecture (**January 18, 1978**) Foucault takes up the security apparatus from the point of view of **events**. Security is a technological mode constructed for centrifugal motion. Milieus tend to be expansive and is, or, in any case, not stable. Whereas discipline seeks to homogenize and order everything within its orbit, security lets diverse things go as they have been going as long as it remains possible to observe them and, if need be, modulate them. A security apparatus seeks to apply itself to existing details of existing processes so as to be able to intervene in the course of future events. Whenever possible, security does not seek to block the course of things or to forbid actions. It is positioned at a meta-level, so as to ascertain first where things are going regardless of whether one approves of that directionality. Security, and this mode constitutes a major innovation, resists the application of a priori judgments, especially moral ones. Security operates in an optimal manner when it succeeds in taking things up at the level of their “effective

⁵ P.23.

reality.” Its challenge is to use existing elements in a milieu to annul or limit nefarious tendencies and to maximize beneficial ones through means appropriate to their specific conditions and potentials.⁶

To illustrate how a security apparatus comes into being, Foucault takes the example of food (especially grain) shortages (*disette*) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As is customary with his examples, he locates the material far in the past, basing his interpretation on primary sources; this style of analysis opens the question of how the present is configured but does not answer it. A food shortage must be distinguished from a famine. Relative scarcity can take place for a diverse series of reasons even at times when there is grain available, even locally. Thus, scarcity is relative, it is a different kind of event and it poses a different kind of problem both for the governed and those governing them than a full scale famine or drought. Scarcity is linked in a recursive manner to other phenomenon, such as hoarding or price rises, which are not the unique cause of the scarcity although they may well contribute to its onset or severity, factors which feed back and contribute to the scarcity itself, which then cause price rises, popular revolt, government intervention, and the like. Hence scarcity is not a simple phenomena of shortage alone. To understand its dynamics, its components must be analyzed in their specificity (this harvest, these merchants, this governor, the history of this city, etc.) and then dealt with in their differing combinations and temporalities.

Shortages represented a major security problem for the French authorities during the eighteenth century because scarcity of grain frequently led to urban food riots. “*Fléau du cote de la population, catastrophe, crise si vous voulez, du coté du gouvernement.*”⁷ Previously in Western history, such event had been interpreted as either the products of arbitrary ill fortune (immediate factors like a freeze, too little or too much rain or sun, etc., factors over which the government or the peasants had no control). Fortune was also a major topic of reflection for those who attempting to rule for regardless of the cause of a bad turn of events, the consequences had to be taken into account by the Prince and his people.⁸ Such events, however, were also coded under the sign of man’s evil nature in so far as the scarcity was understood as arising from man’s propensity to greed, avarice, lack of charity, etc. The insatiable greed of merchants was commonly an imputable cause of scarcity as they watched the price of grain rise, they kept more of it off the market for as long as possible so as to raise their profits. Man’s fallen nature and ill consequence were culturally coded as a form of divine punishment. While both of these registers continued to be at play, then as now, another type of political rationality was slowly taking

⁶ P.48.

⁷ P.32.

⁸ Hannah Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*,

shape, adjacent to and eventually deeply imbricated with these cultural modes of understanding and action.

The French King and his ministers over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth century had developed and instituted a set of mechanisms to deal with shortages. The doctrine associated with this form of intervention is generally known as “mercantilism.” Mercantilist measures were predominantly of a juridical and disciplinary type. The mercantilist system is essentially one designed to limit scarcity because by limiting scarcity one limited the likelihood of urban revolt. These measures were intended not only to reduce the impact of a scarcity once it was underway but also equally, to prevent it before it started. They included price controls (especially on stocked materials), control on sales including obligatory sale of goods, limitation of exportation, but also price guarantees in times of abundant harvests when prices would fall too low for peasants to earn a minimum income necessary for their survival. All of these measures required an increasingly elaborate and costly system of surveillance of goods, of their movements, of international trade, of weather conditions, of regional differences in climate, of harvests, and the like. It was not lost on the authorities that the system did not work especially well: keeping prices low kept peasants always at the edge of survival. This led them to invest a minimum in planting and this made them vulnerable to changes, even small ones, in climatic conditions. It was neither particularly effective nor efficient requiring as it did significant numbers of overseers, officials, police and related others.

Starting in the eighteenth century, and explicitly posed against the premises and practices of the mercantilist system, there arose another approach, identified with the name of the Physiocrats, who sought to remedy the shortcomings of the previous system. The Physiocrats advocated the free circulation of grains and more generally freedom of commerce. By the middle of the eighteenth century, these initial principles had been developed into a larger theory of the economy, one that amounted to a general theory of government. And it is within that set of debates that the security apparatus began to take on increasing coherence.

The historical detail of these doctrines – and their connection to the rise of liberalism – are not pertinent here. Let us just identify a few topics that will carry over into future discussions. First, there is a shift away from the market and its mechanisms as the central site of intervention and regulation; increasing attention is given to the overall understanding of the grains themselves; increased attention to the entire cycle of production of the natural materials, especially as concerns the increase of knowledge of their nature and of points that things can be maximized or minimized. The Physiocrats urged more attention to these oscillations and to a related series of variables that might influence the course of events. Foucault refers to this mode of attention as one that focuses increasingly and with more specificity on the things themselves,

their elements, and conditions. Among other things this approach entails leaving behind as much as possible the moralistic and theological discourses of fortune and human disposition as the explanatory stopping points.

Out of these developments arose a new understanding of the “**population**” as a quasi-natural object. The art of government became the art of inducing and regulating the population to act in accord with its inherent laws.

“On intègre sans cesse de nouveaux éléments, on intègre la production, la psychologie, les comportements, les manières de faire des producteurs, des acheteurs, des consommateurs, des importateurs, des exportateurs, on intègre le marché mondial. Il s’agit donc d’organiser, ou en tout cas de laisser se développer des circuits de plus en plus large.”

This political object stands in tension with that of the “people” and their rights and duties, infractions and revolts etc.

Third Lecture

In the third lecture (**January 25, 1978**) Foucault uses the example of inoculation (1720) and vaccination (1800) to draw a series of contrasts between sovereignty, discipline, and security. Again, the contrasts primarily serve the heuristic function of identifying and illustrating particular dimensions of the security apparatus. Specifying a second site of emergence of elements of security, the lecture refers to the small pox epidemics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, taking up the security apparatus from the point of view of **normalization**. As Foucault had shown in his earlier study of the birth of the prison, the disciplinary apparatus was based on technologies of normalization built to intervene in a situation by imposing a system of classification, hierarchization, and distribution. Discipline, Foucault reminds his audience, works essentially as a normalizing gaze, ordering and differentiating everything within its horizon. What, then, is the corresponding place of normalization within the security apparatus?

In the eighteenth century, the mortality rate of small pox turned out to be high; it was not unusual for one out of eight people to die. During the Classical Age, the campaigns against small pox brought into play a series of radically new modes of intervention, inoculation, and vaccination, resulting in an overall reduction of the mortality rate. According to Foucault, four aspects characterized the new campaigns: (1) The approach was strictly preventative. (2) It was almost

⁹ P.46.

completely successful. (3) It proved to be effective without undue cost either, economic or political, to the entire population. (4) The rationale for vaccination was completely outside of the reigning medical theories. The small pox campaigns, in other words, were radically empirical undertakings.

As Foucault underscores, there are four corollary developments that account for and mark the successful integration of the campaigns of inoculation and vaccination into the emerging security apparatus.

1. The emergence and application of statistical methods rendered the phenomenon of a small pox epidemic intelligible in terms of a calculation of probabilities. The campaigns of inoculation and vaccination were based on the new mathematics of the seventeenth century.

2. In their mode of intervention, the campaigns of inoculation and vaccination reflected a core principle of the security apparatus. The campaigns took up material givens and turned their inherent properties into a target of modulation so as to produce a counter-effect. *“[L]a variolisation n’essayait pas tellement d’empêcher la variole qu’au contraire de provoquer chez les individus que l’on inoculait quelque chose qui était la variole elle-même, mais dans des conditions telles que l’annulation pouvait se produire au moment même de cette vaccination qui n’aboutissait pas à une maladie totale et complète, et c’était en prenant appui sur cette espèce de première petite maladie artificiellement inoculée que l’on pouvait prévenir les autres attaques éventuelles de la variole.”*¹⁰ The small pox virus itself, as a material given, was used in modified form to trigger off an immunity effect within the body. This approach, however, was carried out without any real understanding of how the mechanism actually worked. Additionally, the campaigns of inoculation and vaccination were innovative because there was a consistent stripping away of embedded moralistic interpretations of who was falling ill and why. Epidemics were increasingly (although not entirely) severed from a cultural understanding eager to code disastrous diseases as signs of a fallen world and the evilness of man. While the medical theory of the seventeenth century was ready to accept certain diseases as almost natural events, related to a certain group of people, to a certain way of life, to a certain territory or climate, the campaigns of inoculation and vaccination introduced a new mode of attention to things, focusing on **cases** and their **distribution** among a **population**. There was an empirically extrapolated attention to the unevenly distributed probabilities of falling ill, of the differential intensity and spread of the epidemic’s waxing and waning in time and space. The statistical calculation of probabilities allowed for an estimation of the risk of a particular individual, based on his age, his profession, his way of life, and place of living. Concomitantly to the new

¹⁰ P.61.

campaigns of inoculation and vaccination the notion of risk emerged as a central concept.

3. These accumulating observations and practices were not drawn from an a priori repertoire of beliefs about how an epidemic was supposed to work with which documented reality often stood in direct contradiction.¹¹ These campaigns became increasingly focused on a target that was conjointly and conjuncturally a phenomenon of population and of milieu. It became clear, for instance, that it was far more dangerous to reside in a city than to live on the countryside. These different arenas of intensity Foucault calls “zones of danger.” I will call them “zones of virulence.”

4. Statistical evaluations lead to the observation of phenomena of acceleration and multiplication. Under the statistical gaze, contagious diseases such as small pox now came into view as a problem of the multiplication of cases. The name given to this new type of problem was: *la crise*.

Referring to earlier medical theory and its traditional way of coping with epidemics, Foucault draws a further distinction between the disciplinary apparatus and the security apparatus. Conventional medical theory and practice advocated the treatment of a disease as it unfolded in a patient at a given moment. Accordingly, the spread of a contagious disease such as small pox was limited by isolating those individuals who had fallen sick. Thus, control of the situation was primarily achieved by identification and isolation of sick bodies already in a state in which they revealed symptoms of a particular disease. The campaigns of inoculation and vaccination, in contrast, did not draw on the distinction between the sick and the healthy. Rather, the security apparatus sought to take into account the population as a whole, calculating by statistical means what Foucault calls a “normal mortality.” Thus the contrast between discipline and security reveals a reversal in the relationship between the norm and the normal. Disciplinary technology is based on a norm that enables to distinguish between the normal and the abnormal. The technology of security, on the other hand, takes the normal as its starting point. The normal, in other words, is extrapolated from empirical observations of the real.

“On a donc là quelque chose qui part du normal et qui se sert de certaines distributions considérées, si vous voulez, comme plus normales que les autres, plus favorables en tout cas que les autres.”¹²

¹¹ For examples, see Rabinow, *French Modern*.

¹² P.65.

The security apparatus takes up things at the level of their reality, defined as an ensemble of observable distributions, indicating multiple normalities, amendable to specific modulations.

As in *“Il faut défendre la société”*, Foucault perceives in Machiavelli not the dawning of a new way of thinking, the birth of modern political philosophy as it were, but rather a last articulation of the problem of sovereignty; a problem increasingly irrelevant to the emerging practices of modern governing, as Foucault underscores. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli’s primary concern was with the security (sûreté) of the sovereign who exercises his power within the confines of the territory of a state. The new approach, exemplified by the Physiocrats and the campaigns of inoculation and vaccination of the eighteenth century advocated a different understanding of the territory:

“[N]on plus fixer et marquer le territoire, mais laisser faire les circulations, contrôler les circulations, trier les bonnes et les mauvaises, faire que ça bouge toujours, que ça se déplace sans cesse, que ça aille perpétuellement d’un point à un autre, mais d’une manière telle que les dangers inhérents à cette circulation en soient annulés. Non plus sûreté du prince et de son territoire, mais sécurité de la population.”¹³

Additionally, the security apparatus was not primarily concerned with the relation between the sovereign and his people, aiming at the total submission of the latter to the former. Rather, its focus was on the population and the physical variables that shape the milieu. The totalizing principle animating the disciplinary apparatus appears as *“le plus vieux rêve du plus vieux souverain.”¹⁴* In contrast to the total surveillance of individuals, the goal of the security apparatus was to register tendencies of a particular milieu. Its perspective was essentially partial.

To be sure, the population already came into view in the seventeenth century with the emergence of the doctrines of cameralism and mercantilism, not yet as an object to be worked over, but rather as a productive force assuring the wealth of the nation. Mercantilist political economy advocated disciplinary interventions into the population as a way of increasing the wealth of the state. The population therefore primarily appeared as a collectivity of individuals, who, as subjects of law, were supposed to respect the will of the sovereign. With the advent of the Physiocrats, in contrast, the population came into view as a set of processes *“qu’il faut gérer dans ce qu’ils ont de naturel et à partir de ce qu’ils*

¹³ P.67.

¹⁴ P.68.

*ont de naturel.*¹⁵ The shift in the problematization of the population ultimately resituated its object from the domain of the political to the domain of the natural. The population was thought of as a natural object subjected to a series of variables amendable to specific modulations. The population changed its shape according to the volatility of the market, the regularity of the climate, the quality of education, the frequency of divorce, the law of inheritance, the type of religiosity, and the level of taxes.

Over the course of more than a century of pragmatic and tactical coping with crisis, more systematic reflection and expertise began to accumulate and be available. A figure of an expert, technicians of reflective modulation and transformation, as we might call them, was emerging along with, “*ces techniques de transformations soient à la fois éclairés, réfléchis, analytiques, calculés, calculateurs.*”¹⁶ Along with these accumulating technocratic refractions of pragmatic results came a (frequently merely tacit) acknowledgement of the critical limits of the applicability and efficacy of the technologies of power of both sovereignty and discipline. The very goal of these political rationalities, control, totalization, and transparency also constituted their limits. Authorities, administrators, and eventually philosophers began to observe, conceptualize, and practice the brute fact that one could not always change phenomena through an administrative fiat. “It soon became clear that it was not only the inert nature of stubborn subjects that accounted for the lack of effect of orders issued by the sovereign. One was not dealing uniquely with legal subjects whose will could be bent by the power of the sovereign, or ordered by the application of disciplinary technology. The laws of the population were of a different scale than individual wills: they were more than just the sum of individual actions of law abiding citizens. “*En fait, les variables dont dépend la population la font, pour une part très considérable, échapper à l’action volontaristes et directrice du souverain dans la forme de la loi.*”¹⁷ What constituted a limit was not due to the political consciousness of a people, but rather to the inertia of a population constrained by a set of variables. “*La population apparaît donc là, dans cette espèce d’épaisseur par rapport au volontarisme légaliste du souverain, comme un phénomène de nature.*”¹⁸ The inertia of the natural and the social accounted for the ineffectiveness of the orders of the sovereign.

Accordingly, interventions did not immediately focus on the population, but rather on elements of the milieu that seemed, on first sight, external to the population itself, the circulation of money, for instance, or the proportion

¹⁵ P.72.

¹⁶ P.75.

¹⁷ P.73.

¹⁸ P.73.

¹⁹ P.73.

between import and export, etc. The security apparatus sought to transform the milieu by way of modification of the variables that currently shape it. The government's interventions were not opposed to the nature of the population, they rather acted from within and sought to operate with nature's help, taking up existing processes for its own purposes. As Foucault puts it:

“La population, c’est un ensemble d’éléments à l’intérieur duquel on peut remarquer des constants et des régularités jusque dans les accidents[] à propos duquel on peut repérer un certain nombre de variables dont il est dépendant et qui sont susceptibles de le modifier.”²⁰

Accordingly, at issue were members of a population that was constituted by a series of elements that were neither transparent nor directly open to simple ordering. In order to influence the population's true productive capabilities, health, and happiness other arts and other techniques were required.

“On a une population dont la nature est telle que c’est à l’intérieur de cette nature, à l’aide de cette nature, à propos de cette nature que le souverain doit déployer des procédures réfléchies de gouvernement.”²¹

Population, as milieu, became an object of knowledge as well as a target of power relations. It is in this light that the “naturalness” of the population as an object of management came into being. Foucault identifies a shift becoming visible during the middle of the eighteenth century, one underscored by a change from the older term “*le genre humain*” to the use of an unprecedented neologism, “*l’espèce humain*.” When humankind was categorized as one species among other living beings, regardless of the hierarchical relationships that obtain between them, a threshold, a biopolitical one at that, is crossed.

There is a correlate term to population and that term is “the public.” “The public is the population taken up by its opinions, its manner of living, its habits, its fears, its prejudices, its demands; it is that upon which one can work through education, campaigns and convictions. The population is that which extends from its biological roots in the species to the surface reachable through the public.”²²

“L’homme, ce n’est, après tout, rien d’autre, tel qu’il a été pensée, défini, à partir des sciences dites humaines du XIX siècle et tel

²⁰ P.76.

²¹ P.77.

²² P.77.

*qu'il a été réfléchi dans l'humanisme du XIX siècle, cette homme
ce n'est rien d'autre, finalement, qu'une figure de la population.”²³*

Thus, it is the problematization of the population within the frame of living beings, in a milieu, observed and administered with a political rationality of close attention, economy, efficiency, responsible action, and modulated regulation that is the correlate of the figure we used to know as “*l'homme*.” Today, that figure is mutating.

²³ P.81.