

Images and societies of control

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This third number of *Re-visiones* owes its thematic issue – “Images and societies of control” – to the last of the seminars held within the project *Images of Art and the Re-writing of Narratives in Global Visual Culture*, an encounter with Maurizio Lazzarato, who at the time had just published his book *The Making of Indebted Man. Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* [1]. The seminar was held in critical times of the economic crisis that was affecting Spain in particular – as a member of the PIGS – when capital, in one of the inevitable alignments we have grown accustomed to, throws its low merchant’s cloth on the floor and sells the banks’ toxic assets, while perverse austerity policies were fit to that end. By, then, occupy movements, though “minimal”, tried to “invent time-space arrangements” [2]; despite the hope in the successive waves formed, at a global level, in the sea of an apparently unstoppable multitude, we could also see how, above these waves, the man in control, who – as Deleuze accurately pointed out – is undulatory, stayed in orbit and surfed “in a continuous network” [3]. So, if one of the previous numbers was dedicated – in a certain tone of hope – to the link between image, body and knowledge, and another issue focussed on the performativity of the image, we were now traversed by words such as credit, trust, debt, disrepute, promise, guilt, deficit, risk, insecurity, uncertainty... With Lazzarato, we decided that his words of almost a decade ago are in force more than ever: “The paradigmatic body of our societies is no longer the mute body moulded by discipline, but rather it is the bodies and souls marked by the signs, words and images” [4]. Every day we got up ‘marked’ by these words and images, these signs that put us on the brink of the abyss; the media had a perfect command of the dynamic sublime and, especially, of the mathematical, subject, as we were, to the talibanism of figures: “Like the Grand Canyon, the fall of the banks can be a terrifying but sublime spectacle”, said in 2008 the urban planner and writer Mike Davis in *Can Obama see the Grand Canyon?* [5]. The old phantasmagoria that constituted us from Marx’s Book I of *The Capital* to *Debord’s The Society of the Spectacle* unfolded in a block-language, a straitjacket-discourse that denied us any critical and transparent genealogy of the state of affairs that had brought us to the broadcasting of sentences such as “deadly embrace between debt and bank” or the fact of being “on the edge of the financial abyss”.

“Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt”. This is Deleuze’s conclusion about control societies in his *Post-scriptum* [6], a brief text which, given the huge body of references on the issue, is still an unequivocal place to come back to. The shift from a disciplinary society (Foucault) to the society of control outlined by Deleuze is full of images, but these are linguistic; in this way, “[T]he coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill”. In contrast to enclosures as fixed moulds, controls are a modulation, “a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point”; flexible meshes

and nets; passwords (numbers) instead of watchwords; starting afresh instead of unlimited deferral; confinement and discipline versus open air and mechanisms of control. Twenty-three years later, we can recognize ourselves in his sketches, which we have already incorporated unconsciously: percepts and affects constitute “a nonphilosophical understanding of philosophy” [7].

Re-visiones explores this state of things from various perspectives. The text by Tania Castellano looks into the double awareness of the modern subject, between ‘suffering’ and ‘alienation’, from Beckett’s *Film* to some artists who have treated the subject of technological immersion and surveillance. Beyond the walls where Object-Keaton takes shelter, Javier Fresneda immerses us in the Outernet, in the sense of that which “allows us to embody the attributes in which the image negotiates agreements between humans and non-humans”. José Miguel Cortés warns us in his article that, within the open air of fluxes, the city is marked by spaces of control and that the planning of urban space uses certain technologies of control that affect “aspects of inclusion or exclusion, of visibility and concealment, of control or subjugation, with which citizens have to cope”. Francesca Martinez Tagliavia reviews Gustave Le Bon’s text *The Crowd*, defending visual criticism as a possible way to overthrow the populism and the charismatic manipulation that dwell behind the dominant ideologies of the twentieth century. It is a necessary starting point to address the issue of masses from new perspectives. Brian Holmes, in turn, offers us a theory of the *eventwork* as “[d]eliberately breaking the normalized flow of collective experience, with the intent to provoke political debate and action”. Finding a way out from the “programmed society” seemed an urgent need – yet not simple. In the light of the thought of the last Guattari, Holmes lays out a map of vectors of the previously mentioned *eventwork*. Closing the issue, Julián Cruz outlines a small genealogy of what he calls “insurrectionary acts” – those that try to escape from the suffocating control that has seeped into the bones of painstaking and forewarned citizens –, a sort of *mise en abyme*, of control within control. He includes a small collection of insurgents, among which are William Burroughs who – not by accident, according to Deleuze’s texts that accompany us – undertook the analysis of “continuous control and instant communication” [8].

There is something in Deleuze’s text that directly concerns Academia. In a few pages, he repeatedly warns about the danger of “continuous forms of control, and the effect on the school of perpetual training, the corresponding abandonment of all university research, the introduction of the ‘corporation’ at all levels of schooling” [9]. The crisis of institutions and the gradual establishment of a new system of domination. And he writes this in 1990.

Knowledge, power and control are intertwined, and we would have to go on to ask about the devices in which we have become entangled. It is clear that the courses we teach belong to an education system that is “governmentalized”, and we do well in following Foucault: “power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions” [10]. The multiple university curricula are still defending with tooth and nail deeply rooted disciplines, Hegelian programs, and the cover of many professors for whom, still today, ‘it is too late’ to adapt to the changing times. The methodological criteria by which our research is assessed also come close, most of the times, to this model. Inevitably, all power relations understood in the Foucaultian terms of the same text are accompanied by “a whole field of responses,

reactions, results, and possible interventions” that open to them. That is: they come with resistances. I wonder if this only happens once we close our classroom doors, once we make small improvements in the programs and introduce different formats for the practicums, and I wonder if this is our only room for manoeuvre. Meanwhile, you “[o]bey the rules of your discipline (research the right things, publish research in the right places, quote the right people [...]) or the discipline will punish you accordingly” [11]. In this case, control goes hand in hand with penalty. To also think about the matters that concern us in relation to research, its transfer, its evaluation and its relation with the dominant languages and knowledges [12], is a way to assess our resilience or our submission to control.

Footnotes

[1] Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2012. Original edition (2011): *La fabrique de l’homme endetté : Essai sur la condition néolibérale*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, retrieved 20 December from http://www.cip-idf.org/IMG/pdf/Lazzarato_interior2_sofi.pdf.

[2] Deleuze, G. (1995) Control and becoming. Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Antonio Negri. In G. Deleuze, *Negotiations* (pp. 169-176), New York, Columbia University Press. Original title: *Contrôle et devenir*. English text retrieved 20 December from http://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/6._deleuze-control_and_becoming.pdf.

[3] Deleuze, G. (1990/1995), Post-scriptum on the societies of control, October, winter 59: 3-7, p. 6, retrieved 20 December 2013 from https://files.nyu.edu/dnm232/public/deleuze_postscript.pdf. Original edition: *L’autre journal*, 1, may.

[4] Lazzarato, M. (2003), *Struggle, event, media*, transl. Aileen Derieg, retrieved 20 December 2013 from http://www.republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01_en.htm.

[5] Davis, M. (2008), Can Obama see the Grand Canyon? On presidential blindness and economic catastrophe II, *Tomdispatch.com*, 15 October, retrieved 20 December 2013 from <http://www.truth-out.org/archive/item/80572:can-obama-see-the-grand-canyon>.

[6] Deleuze, G. (1990/1995), Post-scriptum, op. cit.

[7] Deleuze, Carta a Reda Bensmania sobre Spinoza (Letter to Reda Bensmania about Spinoza), in *Conversaciones*, Valencia, Pre-textos, p. 260.

[8] Deleuze, Control and becoming, op. cit.

[9] Deleuze (1992), Post-scriptum, op. cit., p. 7

[10] Foucault, M. (1994), The subject and power, *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4): 777-795, p. 793, retrieved 20 December 2013 from http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/undergraduate/modules/ph348/2013-14/foucault_-_the_subject_and_power.pdf. Original publication: *Le sujet et le pouvoir*. In *Dits et écrits* (Quotations and writings) (pp. 222-243), vol. IV, Paris, Gallimard.

[11] Shepherd, L. (2012), Transdisciplinarity: The politics and practices of knowledge production, blog post 23 November, retrieved 20 December 2013 from <http://thedisorderofthings.com/2012/11/23/transdisciplinarity-the-politics-and-practices-of-knowledge-production>.

[12] As Beatriz Preciado brilliantly pointed out years ago, “[i]n the current state of total_micro_war over the domination of the production of codes, rendering a true cartography of the established knowledge base, a complete plan of the vectors of criticism of the prevailing knowledges and languages, would mean to give up the game. It is rather a question of identifying certain movements of the prevailing knowledges toward a multiplicity of local or minority knowledges” (Preciado, B. [2005], “Saberés_vampiros @ War” [Vampire_knowledges @ War], retrieved 20 December 2013 from <http://biopoliticayestadosdeexcepcion.blogspot.com.es/2010/08/sabersevampiroswar-beatriz-preciado.html> (blogpost by Norberto Gómez, 31 August 2010). Original edition (2005), *Multitudes*, 20, spring, available at <http://multitudes.samizdat.net>.