Chapter 4

Periopticon: control beyond freedom and coercion – and two possible advancements in the social sciences

Michalis Lianos

Post-industrial societies largely experience freedom as competitive individual participation in work and consumption. In many ways, security inevitably becomes the most indispensable part of freedom when freedom is exerted via capitalist competition. Surveillance presents itself then as a precondition rather than an antagonist of democracy, a necessary precaution for governing a society where individuals combine available ready-made options in their effort to distinguish themselves from others. Paradoxically, the question to ask in this context is if we can have a democratic society without some form of control that homogenises collective behaviour and, to the same extent, makes formal surveillance redundant.

The link between democracy and freedom is a product of history. Since modernity, we understand this link as the association between majority voting and individual liberties. This is how the private sphere was established as the fulcrum of sovereign bourgeois identity, a sphere that no one is entitled to enter except when the justice system authorises it on grounds of serious criminal suspicion. From this angle, privacy, and the consequent lack of surveillance, is the historical assertion of an ascending class and its priorities and interests, as Elias has shown (Perrot, 1990: 89, 473; Ronnes, 2004; Delzescaux, 2002). Conversely, freedom for the lower classes is rarely associated with the lack of social control and an impenetrable individual sphere. It is primarily a matter of having the means to be free in practice, that is, a matter of equality. Post-industrial democracies are caught in this transitional trap between the rise of the mass society and the decline of the bourgeois subject as a hegemonic citizen. As a result, the opposition between control and democracy is increasingly defused as we move towards Automated Socio-Technical Environments (Lianos and Douglas, 2000; Lianos, 2003). In fact, the very meaning of democracy changes as such environments deliver to the post-industrial citizens the efficient outcomes of a dense web of institutions and organisations which shape both the market and the state.

Dystopias of social control

Understandings of control based on discipline and surveillance were faced with a minor challenge during the 1990s. Dangerousness was quickly being

recognised as the fulcrum of understanding and criminalising deviance. As a result, dangerousness had to be integrated into the critique of panoptical dystopias and disciplinary nightmares. There was an obvious match to make between the understanding of control in terms of discipline and the rise of dangerousness, since only that match would allow criminology to joyfully continue on the well-trodden path of critiquing an omnipresent, restrictive, disciplinary and pervasive control, exerted by powerful state institutions that stand sovereign and overlook individuals, groups and societies. A long series of works has integrated dangerousness into the understanding of social control, which remains focused on coercion and discipline (for an overview, see Coaffee, 2005).

All evidence that nuances or abates that perspective (see for example Alford, 2000; Walby, 2005, 2006) is happily bypassed by the critical ardour of arguments defending liberty, emancipation, identity and a series of other instances of collective and individual freedom. The issue is not of course whether that defence is well intended, for few of us would doubt that. The issue is rather whether critique has instrumentalised reality to the point of abandoning serious analysis of it.

A shortlist of the counter-evidence that I mentioned would certainly include the following points and developments:

- Disciplinary control is neither an exclusive form of control nor its most representative form. Foucault's argument is in fact that it is a specific shaping of control, peculiar to the shaping of the modern subject. In that sense, disciplinary control is a historical outcome of the limits imposed on centralised political power in its post-feudal forms. The obvious doubt that arises is that contemporary conditions are rather different and, in that sense, it would be ahistorical to believe that the same model of control would apply to current conditions. In fact, the more one projects Foucault's historically specific conclusions onto the present the more one betrays Foucault's method and theoretical legacy. Foucault himself cautioned against such indiscriminate projections even for the historical period that he discussed in *Discipline and Punish*:

> The Panoptic system was not so much confiscated by the State apparatuses, rather it was these apparatuses which rested on the basis of small scale, regional dispersed Panopticims. In consequence one cannot confine oneself to analysing the State apparatus alone if one wants to grasp the mechanisms of power in their detail and complexity. There is a sort of schematism that needs to be avoided here— and which incidentally is not to be found in Marx—that consists of locating power in the State apparatus, making this into the major, privileged, capital and almost unique instrument of the power of one

class over another. In reality, power in this exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous, since each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power.

(Foucault, 1972: 72)

- State institutions that remain sovereign over individuals and societies are linked to pacified societies and non-violent forms of control which are, again, historically specific. This is why notions such as biopower or govermentality and their derivatives (e.g. biopolitics) denote a large spectrum of involvement with shaping collective organisation, socioculture and behaviour; they indicate a general mode rather than a concrete form of control. In that sense, it is again the specifics of applied forms of control that can inform us on the nature of relations between institutions and society, not the fact that a broad conceptual label may apply to such relations. Stating that video surveillance or stored health-related data are part of some type of post-industrial governmentality or biopower is not a discovery, much less a critique. It is a *mere fact* that does not advance our understanding of contemporary forms of control.
- Post-industrial capitalism is driven by a new equilibrium between the market and the state. Simply put, the market is today the motor of social and political existence to the point of underlying the entire range of human coexistence, from political legitimacy to individual identity. Control, as an expression of power relations, *cannot but serve* that market/state equilibrium. Therefore, control delivers to all actors the priorities of that hegemonic equilibrium in the form that corresponds to the respective role of each actor in maintaining it. Contemporary control must therefore be as flexible and differentiated as the modes of post-industrial stratification and the multiple structures that support post-industrial capitalist interaction; it must be as flexible and differentiated as the techno-institutional networks that deliver all forms of management, from distribution of goods to political governance and from mobility of capital to personal entertainment (Castells, 2000: 18ff).
- Finally, an obvious point: there is no intentional, unified or even conscious socio-cultural project in post-industrial societies, much less an overarching ideological framework that disciplinary control presupposes. There are few prescriptive values and practically no institutions that would be inclined to promote specific values as prescriptive. None of the institutional actors that are powerful in post-industrial societies seek to impose such values via control practices. In fact, it is a precondition of dominance that actors defend their legitimacy on grounds of utility—economic, social or geopolitical—not on grounds of prescriptive values and normative practices.

This is also the consequence of what Robins and Webster propose in their analysis:

> What we have is an ever more extensive information apparatus—propaganda, censorship, advertising, public relations, surveillance, etc.—through which opinion management has become not only authoritarian, but also routine and normative. Our argument is that the totalitarian aspect of this process is to be found in its increasingly systematic (totalising), integrated and 'scientific' ambitions and tendencies. Now, we must emphasise that this argument does not presume the existence of a manipulative and conspirational élite of mind managers. The logic of information control and management is, rather, an integral and systemic aspect of the modern nation state.
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> (Robins and Webster, 1999: 142)

In a nutshell, it seems that fascination with Big Brother has overshadowed the premises of its very critique. Big Brother is not totalitarian *because* he holds information on individuals and on society as a whole, but he seeks to hold information because he is totalitarian. Control in this case is used to enforce values that are minutely laid down on an ideological map, but it is not control as such that generates such values. Totalitarianism, or for that matter any form of direct coercion, is not the only motive for gathering information; management, coordination or mere financial gain are frequent causes too (Lyon, 2003: 14). Although control is by definition associated with power, it is perhaps time to face the possibility that accumulated data do not necessarily amount to a plan and even less so to a totalitarian plan.

The fact that information can be used to several ends, sometimes subsequent to its gathering, is well known. Nowhere is that more frequent than in 'traditional' societies where all information on each other is a powerful resource used to generate the highest degree of conformity. This is also why authoritarian or totalitarian regimes prefer that form of 'community' control. (See for example Zhong and Broadhurst, 2007 on China and Pfaff, 2001 on Eastern Germany, where centralised surveillance was really much less effective than 'community' control; see also a plea for resorting to the power of community control today in Hirst, 2000). To those who study social control these are banal statements, not critical findings; for these, one would more usefully turn to the fundamental questions that in my view underlie the critical understanding of social control in any society, independently of time:

> *What are the mechanisms that explain conformity within a society and how do they deliver in practice the priorities imposed by that society's model of socio-economic organisation?*
> *How do dominant socio-economic actors shape the socioculture that tends to use social control to maintain their influence?*

Control and the institutional web

The market is the obvious point of departure for asking these questions in a post-industrial context. Contemporary capitalism has transformed the very essence of what we understand as an institution. The shaping of an institutional web comprised of private organisations and public institutions is at the origin of a series of transformations in human sociality. That web brings operational efficiency because it fragments the dense social bond of community relations into task-specific roles. As Haesler points out:

> […] institutions should be understood as obstacles in the first instance. They should be understood as third parties whose role is either to prevent fusion [in human relations] or to perpetuate incomplete relations. This universe of rules and procedures is, however, ambivalent as such; in imposing order on the chaos of relations, institutions display that annoying tendency towards hegemony, which leads to a totalitarian order if pursued to its end.
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> (Haesler, 2005)

To sum up a long analysis (see Lianos, 2001a), interaction via cultural structures, which was historically the primary form of negotiating human relations, has been largely replaced by interaction via organisational settings. Functional institutional priorities have supplanted values and beliefs as coordinating mental maps. Utilitarian claims on efficiency have drastically limited the capacity of post-industrial societies to interact through cultural systems, i.e. systems that are not controlled by institutional 'third parties' seeking to frame human interaction according to institutional priorities.

The founding 'third party' in this sense was of course the modern state, with its intention and capacity to mediate social interaction towards a specific political project, what we recognise as modernity. The social sciences have been fully aware of this phenomenon and its ramifications,[1] but have refused to look at the continuation of this process, which now involves not only the state and its dependent institutions but all types of institutional actors and, in particular, all private-sector actors. It is in fact the continuing fascination with the state as a sovereign socio-political actor that keeps us from understanding that the establishments that mediate human behaviour, from the local shop to the global conglomerate, are all institutions. I will focus this general problematic on the theme of social control.

Institutions are defined by their capacity to shape mental and physical human interaction, in relatively stable and recognisable forms. Anything that endures and produces normativity is an institution. That is the thread that links entities of very different orders, such as marriage, the army, religion, universal suffrage, the National Museum of Modern Art, potlatch, or social security. Late-modern normativity is produced as part of organisational flows

of action which configure individual and social behaviour according to the specific settings of those flows. This is the very meaning of being a 'user' of such settings, i.e. a passenger in a transport system, a spectator in a media system, and—inevitably—a 'client' in almost every system, from the luxury industry to welfare distribution. Some implications of that development are of particular interest here:

i. Late-modern normativity is mentally fragmented but organisationally convergent. The rules that govern each institutional environment are not meaningful as part of our overall social coexistence but as norms of efficient operation. We move from a *polysemic* normativity, where over-all values govern the operation of all specific settings, to a *monosemic* normativity, where there is no link between the different sets of rules that are to be observed as we perpetually traverse successive operational settings.

ii. Accordingly, social control processes are redefined. Conformity is essentially demanded by post-industrial institutions not on the grounds of sovereignty or a value-based culture, but on the grounds of efficient performance that will benefit users and providers alike. As there is no other reason to always drive on one side of the road apart from the fact that it is more efficient to do so, no additional reason is needed to establish, withdraw and modify rules except for the evidence that people, goods and information move faster, easier and safer. The basis of conformity thus shifts towards organisational evidence and efficient competition within the institutional web. *Compliance is efficiency*.

iii. The innumerable and ever expanding uses of the institutional web, of which only a small part will be explored by any one post-industrial citizen during her lifetime, have grown to the point of composing almost all individual and collective experience. 'Direct' social relations cannot compete with the institutional web in terms of reliability, diversity of supply or facility of access. The decline of community and personalised social relations such as friendship, is in fact no more than the outperformance of these relations by institutional efficiency. That decline brings to similar decline the cultural complexities of social control as we knew it. *Instead of enforcing reciprocal conformity to a shared culture, social control is now a matter of optimally exploiting institutional resources.*

iv. Not unlike capitalism, contemporary social control neither constitutes nor reflects a prescriptive project for social behaviour except in as much as it concerns maintaining the conditions of diversity and competition. In this sense *late-modern control is less and less social*, and that is why I provisionally used the term 'new social control' (Lianos, 2001a) until the passage of time allows us to see it more clearly.

v. The combination of these tendencies forms a context that obliges us to seriously reconsider the very premises of thinking about social control.

a. First, the lack of an overarching social, cultural and political content does not allow for critiques still attached to a model which assumes that control aims to produce a specific social subject. No soul is trained, no moral 'dressage' is intended; *the modern subject is well behind us*.

b. Second, the subject under control needs to ascribe some meaning to the continuum of functions that jointly shape the institutional web into a puzzle of experience. Such interpretive work is required, if only to sustain the degree of coherence that is indispensable to self-conscience and social identity. Beyond its minimal content of ensuring operational efficiency, control *is realised via a paradoxical autonomy of the controlled subject*.

c. Third, the functions that compose the institutional web seek to accelerate flows and make them more reliable. The purpose is activation, autonomy and growth, not hindrance. Late-modern control *can only be justified by its originators as a necessary evil*, not as a properly legitimate social function. This is why it is meaningful to speak of 'unintended' control, in the sense that it is not exerted to deliver conformity to a pre-existing model but to prevent actions that antagonise the optimal function of the specific institutions.

d. Fourth and most significantly, late-modern control *is conceived to enable, to augment, to liberate individual action and desire*. It is a procedural accompaniment to the main theme of fluid capitalism, not a function aimed at preventing activities that might lend themselves to deviance, a function that used to be the essence of social control.

These developments can be organised into three major transitions: *privatisation, dangerisation* and *periopticity*. Privatisation should be understood both in its admitted sense, i.e. that of non-state actors being increasingly at the origin of controlling practices (Bharat Book Bureau, 2008, Avant, 2005, Lock, 1999), but also in the sense that the development of an asocial control via the uninterrupted presence of institutional functions is profoundly atomising. The homogeneity of the mass society is supported by an overwhelming diversity in the minutiae of individual experience that is capable of maintaining the illusion of personal uniqueness. The endless combinations of such minutiae allow for each individual trajectory to be distinct from any other. Control practices and *dispositifs* filter, trace and supervise that trajectory *as a distinct private experience*. Contrary to a panoptical arrangement, CCTV, magnetic gates, RFID tags, turnstiles and biometric access control seek to filter out threatening exceptions without imposing common rules and morals. Traceability and retroactive identification, two of the major logics of contemporary control, are precisely oriented towards reconstituting distinctly unique instances of existence. The tendency toward privatisation is in this sense an approach that governs not only the production but, less obviously, also the delivery of

control. We have entered the era of a control *in personam*, which is concerned with all levels of individual existence, public and private, and not any longer meant to address society as such.

Social control has largely become a private affair, and in that sense, it is less and less social. The institutional web applies control as a means to exploit contact with individuals (e.g. as consumers) or to manage and contain that contact (e.g. in traffic flows, crowd control or deviance). Far from being a political and economic conspiracy, this transition represents the exit of sociality from community settings, which is largely due to the very support and efficiency of the institutional web. Mutually enforced cultural values have consequently been replaced with private, individual adherence to specific settings of behaviour that are socially validated by an institutional rubber stamp. The endless and seamless transition from one framework of adherence to another is our new sociality and, like pre-modern and modern sociality, it signifies belonging to a hegemonic socio-economic and cultural model and being controlled for compatibility with that model. Contemporary normativity therefore does not enforce abstract value systems but one unified principle: do not disrupt the efficiency of the institutional web. This is the underlying explanation for the redundancy of grand narratives: society works for you without asking you to hold any specific beliefs or even opinions, just to not hinder how it works. Contemporary control simply delivers the essence of capitalism as the lowest common social denominator. Inevitably, this entails private, albeit massively multiplied, arrangements between institutions and users. When one drives, enters any place except for one's own home, travels by plane or uses a computer programme, one implicitly accepts traffic rules, non-smoking rules, biometric controls and intellectual property rights. Doing these things, using the institutional web, is the current form of social belonging and it should not be surprising that it includes in-built dimensions that enforce the web's hegemony. This is after all what social control is, a framework of preconditions to social belonging. The interesting development is that this framework is now mediated by massive, but private, relations with the institutional web.

In its daily expression, *dangerisation* is the tendency to look at the world from a point of view of threat avoidance with the aggregated effect of increasing the senses of insecurity and the consequent demand for security. The concept of dangerisation is, as such, a critique of the 'risk society' thesis and links the primacy of threat in late-modern culture and governance with the socio-economic premises of social change (Lianos, 1999). Avoiding the pitfall of attributing a risk culture to new, qualitatively different dangers is essential, because doing so would distract us from the interesting processes at work, i.e. the processes that represent socio-economic conditions via a specific culture. I have extensively argued (Lianos, 2001a: 29ff, 194ff; 1999) that risk is nothing but the cultural expression of a social deficit peculiar to contemporary

capitalism and that our acutely experienced hegemony of insecurity is a direct and identifiable consequence of specific conjunctures of socio-economic change. Such a thesis both admits the theorisation of the 'risk society' by Beck and Giddens as a descriptive approach, not an explicative one, and diverges from the numerous theoretical comments which have accepted that theorisation as explicative (e.g. Bauman, 2000).

Dangerisation naturally arose in the area of control and deviance much earlier than in many other areas. This is not surprising since the passage from 'direct' to institutionally mediated sociality caused the rapid decline of community-based control mechanisms over non-organised deviance. Developments in fear of crime and bystander behaviour graphically depict that retreat as part of the sense of belonging to a group (Levine et al., 2002). Since the 1970s, dangerousness has increasingly overdetermined the meaning of deviance. That tendency fully imbibed the penal sphere by the late 1980s. Not only did fear become the motor of crime perception and public policy but it also helped spread the dominance of a risk culture within the institutional sphere. Thus rose the continuum that we acknowledge as 'actuarial justice' (Feely and Simon, 1994) and we now take for granted that dangerousness underlies every aspect of dealing with deviance, from the level of concepts (e.g. criminalising behaviour) to that of daily practice (e.g. committing 'incivilities').

Mary Douglas and I have explained in detail (Lianos and Douglas, 2000) the processes that fill the voids opened by the decline of social relations with insecurity. This occurs most conspicuously in what we have called the 'Automated Socio-Technical Environments' (ASTEs) which mediate institutional functions. The efficient performance of the institutional web conveys a culture of insecurity that is now hegemonic. Control mechanisms are part of the vicious circle that fuels demand for institutionally managed and surveyed territories and activities used to distance oneself from threat. The starting point of dangerisation in the area of fear-provoking deviance is generalised suspicion. Suspicion not only allows but obliges the institution to inspect everyone for the 'comfort and security' of everyone else. Within this regime, control performs its traditional function of validating conforming behaviour, with the remarkable difference that this validation does not endorse the collectivity that one belongs to but serves as an institutional guarantee covering the duration of the interaction; this is why we often feel safer in our local shopping mall than in the area in which we live, notwithstanding the fact that in each location we are surrounded by the very same people. The institutional function guarantees operational fluidity and the selective suppression of threats, just like anti-virus software is supposed to do in an IT environment; and like email messages that have been verified as free from viruses, vetted institutional environments confer mutually recognisable guarantees that increasingly amount to social identities.

Dangerisation has de facto transformed late-modern normativity into an order of reciprocal reluctance and continual demand for efficient institutional

mediation between social participants. From this angle, dangerisation underlies not only the hegemony of discourses and practices promoting insecurity but also the illusion that these discourses and practices tend to maintain. That is, dangerisation augments *the illusion of a central source of power and coordination* that is capable and willing to assume the overall governance of post-industrial societies, including the normative priorities of social relations. This comforting belief in centralised control, whose locus is often assumed to be the state, constitutes the grand narrative of late-modern societies. Every form of power is consequently obliged to invest itself with a protective, securing function in order to claim social and political legitimacy. Not only are these claims utilitarian in terms of the primary function of each institutional sector, but they must also include an indispensable security dimension. Water companies provide cleaner, safer water; rail companies provide faster, safer travel; IT companies provide more reliable, safer networks; supermarkets provide tastier, cheaper, safer food; states provide wealthier, safer societies.

Grand narratives cannot establish themselves without some degree of internal antagonism, which sustains their discursive framework as the hegemonic framework of reference. Religion is really powerful when there are schisms and marginal heresies; class struggle when minority groups antagonise the revolutionary orthodoxy; nation-states when local idioms are discreetly spoken at home. Critiques that approach control in terms of coercion and discipline supply, in this context, some ground of cultural survival for the state's declining sovereign functions. Alleging that *dispositifs* of surveillance and data gathering offend citizen rights and fundamental liberties amounts to asserting that states and citizens are still in their historically modernist roles. In that context, individual self-realisation and social identities largely depended upon the ground that the sovereign state was willing to cede by awarding guarantees of non-involvement in social interaction, thus offering the individual a framework of certainty in exchange for a degree of conformity (e.g. Kelsen, 1967: 216ff). Such critiques unwittingly reflect a deeply bourgeois conception of control in which the state coordinates a value-based project for society that promotes individual over collective existence, an orientation perfectly represented in the priority awarded to the protection of privacy.

It has perhaps been adequately explained so far that these critiques are profoundly obsolete with regard to late-modern control. During modernity, the state, with its ancillary mechanisms, was the only institutional mediator of social control. All other controlling functions were still performed by direct social relations. The dense institutional web that today mediates all social interaction has not only atrophied such direct social relations but also marginalised the state as an actor that can determine the dynamics and orientation of the entire social system. Except during major crises, the role of the state and other public institutions is limited to encouraging the growth and increasing the performance of this dynamic. For, state legitimacy depends on the efficient performance of the market in particular, and of the institutional web in

general. In the area of control, the state is therefore a competitive actor with a disproportionate halo bequeathed by modernity. Casting the critique of late-modern control in disciplinary terms takes this halo at face value.

The third major transition in contemporary control is directly related to the competitive nature of the institutional web. While private and public institutions together mediate and configure all social relations, their roles and influence as isolated actors are not guaranteed. To gain and maintain that influence, institutions constantly compete to attract the broadest spectrum and the highest frequency of interactions. The late-modern subject is at the same time empowered and controlled by the institutions that she increasingly chooses over others; she is therefore coveted as a client that adheres to one institutional environment rather than another. This is why it is more appropriate to think of the controlling dimensions of private and public institutions not as panoptical (with a central outward-looking gaze monitoring everybody) but as *perioptical*, since they build their power by attracting the gaze of individual and institutional actors instead of projecting their own gaze onto these actors. Each individual always resides at the intersection of multiple institutional activities all the time and increasingly comes into social existence via her relation with such institutional activities.

The capitalist periopticon

We have moved from a centralised and distributive understanding of control to a fragmented and contributive one. If this seems paradoxical, it is precisely because the disciplinary aspects of modernity do not allow us to acknowledge that social control processes originate in the fusion between our choices about associating in social relations and the inevitability of making such choices. Contrary to the nostalgic assumptions about our past, relations in 'traditional' societies and 'communities' are not undifferentiated (e.g. Lawson, 1992; Peel, 1980). Although each member of such societies is obliged to socially belong, belonging materialises via preferential relations that entail various degrees of association, ranging from close solidarity to intense antagonism. Social-control processes are therefore geared towards integrating differentiation into an overarching normativity reflected in social belonging. From that point of view, *the centralised panoptical metaphor of social control in modernity is a historical exception, not a rule*. Social control is rather a process that generates conformity and determines deviance via varying degrees of adherence to established frameworks of thought and action. This is precisely what happens in contemporary conditions, but with a major difference. Social relations have been replaced by relations with instances of the institutional web. This specificity has important consequences, some of which need to be accentuated here:

i.   The organised settings of institutional environments generally do not negotiate with their users. Instead, they offer their user a given framework

which he can either adhere to, and use the supplied resources, or decline, and reject the contact. The banal omnipresence of this arrangement obscures its significance, for it is constant negotiation between actors that generates social culture; as Mary Douglas graphically put it, when people exchange, they force culture down each others' throats (Douglas, 1978: 6). *Adherence to given institutional settings* is the very source of deculturalised control and the consequent lack of a value-based culture in late modernity. Since normativity becomes an essential binary choice between adhering and refusing, the strategic cultural resources that are mobilised in social negotiation, such as values and beliefs, become redundant because they are inefficient in the new environment (see Lianos, 2001b). As a result, the great majority of interactions in late-modern society are not only institutionally mediated but also institutionally configured in precise ways. Control is consequently a matter of operational compatibility with the structures of late capitalism.

ii. Adhering to institutional expectations would be a highly coercive process, were it not for capitalism. For the institutional web develops innumerable options to which one can adhere in all sectors of activity, from goods and services to art works and tax regimes. Just as social belonging materialises via differential associations in unmediated social normativity, adherence to monosemic institutional environments materialises via the ceaseless exertion of options in late-modern normativity. One should insist that the multiplicity of options does not amount to choice, for there can be no social integration without exerting such options. *Optionality* is an essential part of late-modern control and it is naturally associated with enabling individuals to compete over necessary adherence to the archipelago of institutional outlets.

iii. In post-industrial capitalism, it is unsurprising that competition should be at the centre of understanding control. Accumulating resources depends on one's capacity to mobilise institutional functions to one's benefit. Education modules, career moves, financial products, real-estate acquisitions, eating preferences, sexual partners and social networks, all come together as part of a competitive condition that is hopefully personally adequate. Via the diversity of private and public institutional performance, late capitalism *amalgamates obligation and empowerment through dynamic control processes which are exerted not via disciplinary coercion but via competition.*

iv. Late-modern control is not structured around the state, for both are structured around the institutional web where the logic of the capitalist market prevails. As individuals compete by adhering to the options of institutional activity, institutions compete by providing attractive options in a way that captures the highest possible adherence with the lowest possible resources. Public governance and private management converge to espouse a model of efficiency that mediates social activity in their

respective areas of competence. Benchmarking performance in welfare systems and hospitals is not different from doing so in supermarkets and banks; institutional functions increasingly move from the public to the private sector according to projections of optimal performance, 'better service' and greater value for money. It is by now clear that control processes are also shaped by this plasticity, because normativity is part of the delivered goods and services. In fact, *control processes are themselves an integral part of competition between institutions, which strive to deliver safety via smooth and undisrupted performance.* Making control easier is fundamental to the performance of all systems, particularly large-scale systems that cannot afford breakdowns. This can take many forms, from remotely debited windscreen tags on road tolls to algorithms that control trade limits in financial markets and from transmitting health histories to surgeons and anaesthetists to technologies that automatically detect people drowning in swimming pools. This is why CCTV *dispositifs*, for example, have spread to an otherwise inexplicable level; no institution can afford not to compete to achieve the best balance between control of its field and fluidity of its operation.

Perioptical control expresses the irresistible annexation of three dimensions of social existence by post-industrial capitalism: the structure of political governance, the relations of social collectivities, and personal existence as such. The historical parenthesis of modern control, inspired by the politics of morality and the schemes of sovereign governance, seems to be closing. While the significance of this transition is undoubted, it is important to look at the continuities that sustain contemporary normativity. Before turning to that question, a comment on the ambiguities and uncertainties of periopticity is in order.

Contemporary control perfectly exemplifies Foucault's conception of power. Although the individual actors involved are not equally powerful, even the weakest possess some ability to circumvent rigid rules and seek alternatives as institutions compete for their attention. It is precisely this competition that makes even the most powerful institutional actors fragile. The less obvious but most significant transition in the late capitalist periopticon is that the influence and position of all actors, far from being taken for granted, depends on constant speculation. Any disruption in institutional performance can seriously damage its influence and in many cases the mere supposition that a problem may arise is enough to expose powerful institutions to an irremediable loss of influence. Billions of dollars in share value disappear rapidly with the slightest dysfunction if financial analysts deem it 'a risk.' Officials are hastily disposed of when public institutions come under media pressure. The mismanagement of an individual case that initially looks insignificant can lead to an entire sector being painfully restructured. Again, this is not to say that perioptical control is unstratified; it is deeply stratified and contains remarkable

disproportions that isolated cases do not annul. The difference is that those disproportions in power are not as certain and durable as they used to be. The very structure of the institutional web is such that conjunctural factors may lead to the collapse of the threads spun by institutions facing difficulties. In a competitive context, such gaps serve as opportunities for other institutional actors to rapidly fill the void. Control processes accordingly depend only upon the overall perioptical dynamics, not upon specific institutions, which are increasingly interchangeable. Private policing, for example, replaces functions that were at the heart of the social sovereignty of the state, IT consultants build and manage defence databases, private accountancy firms audit government departments; shopping malls, bus companies and corner shops practice extensive CCTV surveillance and individuals install motion detectors around their houses in a continuum that is essentially concerned with desirable outcomes rather than the symbolic distinction of institutional spheres. Each isolated actor, however powerful, is systemically fragile and cannot aspire to influence late-modern normativity beyond its narrow area of thematic competence and operational efficiency. All actors, taken together as an entire system, provide a very solid basis for perpetuating periopticity because of their competitively generated uncertainty. Individual vulnerability is the cornerstone of collective strength, a condition that invests contemporary control with a distinctive historical role in social organisation. For the first time in human history, social control self-adjusts to organisational priorities and accelerates change rather than delaying it. For over thirty years, perioptical control seems to have been reproducing the effects of the capitalist market in the area of normativity, a tendency that accelerated with the collapse of applied socialism. This facilitation of change by means of control was an unexpected and unplanned development that the studies of control and deviance have yet to acknowledge.

Deviance in perioptical times

We have known control processes as social processes that produce normativity via determining thresholds of deviance. As was pointed out, this configuration is based on socio-cultural negotiation through values, beliefs and other crystallisations of social culture. The involvement of the first institutional actor that aspired to coordinate that negotiation, the modern state, has been extensively studied both in its motives and its intended and unintended consequences (for example, Cohen and Scull, 1983; Garland, 1985; for a less statist perspective, Roodenburg, 2004). Perioptical control has moved a great distance from both these contexts. Its polycentric structure and fragmented, monosemic content poses an obvious challenge to the processes of determining deviance and the various contents that deviance may assume. Criminalised deviance, in particular, is a reliable point of departure. The turn towards risk in criminal legislation and criminal-justice practices is substantiated enough to confirm that *dangerisation has produced a consequential understanding of deviance.*

This can be rendered into a simple axiom according to which any behaviour that causes fear to others should be criminalised. As a result we are faced with a major change in the social classification of crime, which is now de facto divided into fear-provoking and non-fear-provoking offences. Besides relegating most forms of white-collar crime to even more unassailable territory for the criminal law, this bifurcation exemplifies a formidable trend in perceiving deviance not as a social phenomenon but as a personal, intimate threat. Crime has largely become a category of individual vulnerability rather than social acceptability. Of particular interest is the *perceptual proximity* mechanism reinforced by perioptical control. Post-industrial citizens assess information on an offence with regard to the probability of being exposed to a similar act. The middle and lower-middle classes do not worry about being killed by stray bullets on a council estate in a gang-related drive-by shooting. Instead, they are disturbed by unprovoked assaults on people walking their dogs in the park and by children who disappear in 'safe' residential areas. This regression to evading adverse probabilities on an individual level does not only pertain to crime but traverses the whole spectrum of personal existence, including work, health, income and personal relations. Just as happens with institutions, any single individual is by definition interchangeable to the point of being acutely aware of that condition. Competition, in accumulating references for one's CV or in buying houses, has reached the depth of perceived individual exposure to deviance. That convergence is mainly expressed in being able to choose where one lives and the school one's children attend.

Deviance, therefore, follows the pattern of control as deviance is now constituted as a category of defensive, not prescriptive, representations. As the object of control determines the significance of the institutional actor, the perceived victim determines the significance of the offence. Inevitably, the quintessential offence in the perioptical context is what one may term a 'decontextualised' offence, a hazardous act that is not justified by 'normal' circumstances, i.e. a daylight mugging in a 'safe area', or violent bullying in an expensive school. These types of offence cause an entire defensive life plan to collapse, along with its stratified benefits and the institutional guarantees supplied by perioptical control. It is 'the offence that is not meant to happen here, nor to someone like me.'

Expectedly, desocialised, individually oriented control processes entail desocialised constructions of deviance by associating deviance to the disruption of planned activities and trajectories. As normativity and operational efficiency merge under the influence of the institutional web, disruption and deviance also merge. Entering a road in the lane intended for the opposite direction remains illegal today not because of the evaluative premises of the behaviour, i.e. disrespect for the ethics of the Highway Code, but because of the assumption that disrupting operational organisation is dangerous and that awareness of this fact is ingrained in post-industrial conscience. This shared awareness is the very essence of establishing legal principles that do not

associate tort with blame or even wrongdoing (see for example Simester, 2005; Cane, 2002; Watkins, 2006); 'strict liability' is the quintessential normativity and sociality of the institutional web. Beyond traditional forms of penality, this individual and organisational understanding of deviance merges everything that prevents the efficient control of isolated individual trajectories into an increasingly undifferentiated totality of deviant behaviour. A good example of this merger is the UK 'Anti-Social Behaviour Order' whose definition is telling:

An application for an order under this section may be made by a relevant authority if it appears to the authority that the following conditions are fulfilled with respect to any person aged 10 or over, namely—

a.   that the person has acted, since the commencement date, in an anti-social manner, that is to say, in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself; and
b.   that such an order is necessary to protect persons in the local government area in which the harassment, alarm or distress was caused or was likely to be caused from further anti-social acts by him;

(Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, 1.1)

This definition excellently represents the advent of legal measures that deal with deviance in conditions of institutional sociality and perioptical control. The problem can be conceived in simple terms: what is to be done with behaviour that is not attracted by the capitalist periopticon? For, any activity that is not an integral part of the performance of the institutional web is by definition uncontrolled. Those who cannot or, more rarely, do not wish to constantly compete for the benefits of institutional performance become in that sense ipso facto suspicious and potentially deviant because there are no direct sociality environments that can exert more 'traditional' forms of control on their behaviour. What the capitalist periopticon cannot attract is of unknown normative content, therefore outside the limits of established, mutually recognisable conformity. *In perioptical conditions, disenchantment is already deviance*. Distance or abstinence from exploiting institutional mediation may trigger all ills, from 'mucking about' for poor young males to joining a sect for the lower middle classes or becoming a 'martyr' for a religious faith if one's origins allow for radical beliefs. Very few social processes constantly supervise and hinder the rise of alternative socio-cultural environments. Once the post-industrial bird is out of its cage no preset rules direct its flight.

   The role of the state, including the justice system, is to integrate behaviour into the institutional web so as to allow each social participant to simultaneously achieve control, self-realisation and autonomy. By the same token, repression represents failure, particularly when it is passive. For example, any

admission of resorting to 'warehousing' forms of incarceration would today be an admission of institutional weakness; this is why such admissions are strictly avoided despite the harsh reality of overcrowded prisons. This is also why forms of activating and integrative punishment are so symbolically precious today that great concessions are being made in their direction, to the point of assimilating punishment to the self-management of change (e.g. NC Division of Corrections, 2005). The panoptical institutions of modernity sought to build a morally sound, productive subject by avoiding physical violence as a means of punishment. Perioptical late-modern institutions now need to avoid coercion in all its forms, from ideological promotion to carceral punishment, in order to build a continuously active and collaborative subject. Competition and autonomy are naturally the preferred perioptical ways to ensure collaboration with a type of control that is exerted as a function of capitalist performance.

The force of weakness

Perioptical control represents a new era in the relation between institutions and individuals, an era in which cultural negotiation of social interaction and sovereign governance of society have largely been replaced by a web of competing utilitarian functions. The decline of modern institutions is not only of symbolic change, it is first and foremost the consequence of the development of the market into a fully operational substitute both for direct social relations and for the governance of society by the state or, in fact, by any coordinating power. This condition implies a radically different understanding of all institutional dimensions that deliver control in contemporary society; that understanding could be built around five main principles:

i.   *Perioptical control is operationally specific.* As in all times, control is still about achieving optimal conformity to a targeted outcome but this outcome is now limited to purpose-built structures. The main conceptual consequence of this change is that we need to envisage as control the effective sum of the largely unrelated controlling activities which support operational functions.

ii. *Perioptical control is of secondary nature.* Such control accompanies the delivery of enabling primary functions and no longer occupies a primary social function to which productive and organisational relations are subordinated. It follows that conceptualising control as a disciplinary aspect of sociality misses this secondary aspect, which is in fact much more difficult to isolate and identify than previous forms of control.

iii. *Perioptical control is reactive, not active*, in the sense that it is constituted as a multitude of solutions to problems and has no independent cause of existence—and no legitimacy—outside of providing adequate solutions. The social subject becomes accessible to control only in terms of an existing or potential problem.

iv. *Perioptical control is both uncoordinated and highly convergent*, just like the market on which it is inevitably modelled. The absence of a homogeneous framework of governance and the lack of any desire for a homogeneous socio-cultural outcome do not necessarily entail incoherence; this is because the market model ensures meaningful communication between its participants.

v. *Perioptical control is born as practice not as discourse*. It becomes a discourse via the solutions that it provides, that is, inevitably, a discourse on efficiency.

A series of other points can be made in the same direction. The overall dynamic is, however, identifiable. Institutional performance has atrophied direct social relations, which can no longer compete with the reliability of organised systems. The ensuing corrosion of socio-cultural negotiation further weakens the links which were until recently the only concrete forms of sociality. The distinctive line between norm and deviance is now controlled by operational organisation and the degree to which each one of us conforms to such organisation. It is obvious that daily organisational performance requires weak forms of sociality which cannot exist without organisational mediation. Perioptical control reflects precisely the immense force of this weakness by demonstrating that it is possible to generate normativity only as an outcome of decentralised, fragmented, utilitarian coordination.

In light of these developments, significant advancements can be made for the social sciences. One such advancement is to *acknowledge that conformity is not necessarily the outcome of control; it can actually be its generating cause*. Post-industrial control, in particular, shows quite clearly that human beings can mutually align their behaviour without any centralised or coercive prescription, thus giving birth to a hegemonic model which will ipso facto become a model of control. It seems that modern social organisation did not need more than two centuries to overtake age-old human sociality as the dominant engine of conformity. This change was realised via the capillary spreading of competitive market dynamics into all social functions, which delivered efficiency to each isolated social participant, thus making him independent from the others.

A second major advancement is that the corrosion of socio-cultural negotiation in human relations does not necessarily entail the decline of socio-culture as such. In particular, *the existence of norms does not depend upon the existence of values or belief systems*. Once again, post-industrial control shows that meaning arises as a mental picture of an established concrete reality, so long as that reality is binding. Simply put, *what works in terms of motivating behaviour generates conformity to the point of becoming practically binding. When this point is reached, social meaning will ensue and new norms will painfully organise themselves into a total that finally appears coherent*. It is therefore by adapting to the constraints of a fragmented practical world that we generate social coherence and the normativity that goes with it.

Such conclusions update our premises for understanding social control and question well-established perspectives in the social sciences. The Pax Mercatoria (Lianos, 1999) of post-industrial capitalism, a peace justified on grounds of promoting trade and prosperity, and the reconfiguring impact that such commercial peace has on human sociality, is a splendid opportunity to capture normativity as a fundamental dimension of individual existence, in which society originates.

Note

1 From that angle, there is a continuous line linking early legal and socio-legal theory (e.g. the works of Max Weber); state socialism (e.g. Pashukanis's work); Carl Schmitt's exceptionalist legal theory, which was oriented towards institutional efficiency; the nascent economics of late modernity culminating in Keynesianism; and the social critique of the institutional and ideological ramifications of the state, from Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939) to Foucault and Althusser; and to contemporary critiques of control.

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