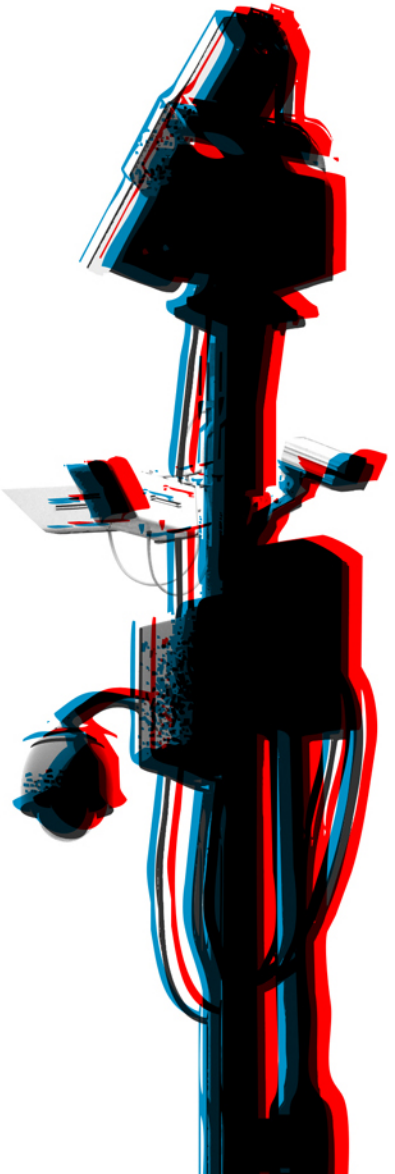
UN PROYECTO DE FUNDACIÓN RODRÍGUEZ + ZEMOS98

PANEL DE CONTROL

INTERRUPTORES CRÍTICOS

PARA UNA SOCIEDAD VIGILADA



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PROLOGUE: CONTROL PANEL

Critical interrupters for a society under close surveillance
A Fundación Rodríguez + ZEMOS98 project

This text was originally conceived as the starting point for the project *Panel de Control. Interruptores críticos para una sociedad vigilada.* It's has gradually taken on its current structure, which serves as an introduction to this publication.

Background

There is some common ground that is unavoidable when tackling the issue of surveillance. The principal starting point deals with the idea of the Panopticon (from Bentham to Foucault), which is applicable to so-called disciplinary societies. Other readings start from the Taylorist obsession with monitoring workers in an attempt to control their performance, and reach into the imaginary – transformed into spectacle – that Orwell's novel helped create, and that predicts a world under the perpetual gaze of Big Brother.

Nevertheless, there have been qualitative changes in "expanded surveillance" phenomena that use the potential of new technology in the setting of contemporary social context, and these require our attention.

Surveillance, becoming-spectacle, together with the prevalence of a "politics of fear", has hastened all kinds of standardisations, assimilation and even the internalisation of control as reality. Like a thin, sticky, flexible coating, this reality has settled over the ideas of "liberation", "rebellion" and "escape" that were embedded as desire (to come into being) in the abovementioned approaches (Panopticon, Taylorism, Orwellian world...). A tough coating, able to immobilise and deactivate autonomous forms of creativity and block cultural divergence. A coating that gradually adds layer upon layer of opacity to the way the political, social and institutional situation is perceived, binding the public and the private and dissolving culture into a morass of banality and forgetfulness.

Deleuze points out that all that is required "to allow for better understanding of what is meant by the crisis of the institutions, is to observe the progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination". And that's the root of the paradigm change. Will the struggle against disciplines or formulas of control that play out in enclosed places give way to new forms of resistance against societies of control? Can we use new positions of divergence to sketch out futures capable of analysing, subverting or challenging the wonders of the new order?

Michel de Certau places subjectivity, as constructed by authority and surveillance (Foucault), as being up against the ordinary man, protagonist of everyday life, which contains the keys to man's ongoing resistance to power.

Through this control panel, we want to enable access to a series of practices that are based on an immediate context of control, but which take a wide ranging view of what Virilio calls this "claustropolis" in relation to global surveillance. The project aims to make sense of this catalogue of everyday micro-resistances that are capable of keeping defence mechanisms alert.

The critical "interrupter" switches that make up this control panel aim to uncover and reveal the ways in which control is transformed into power, and vice versa, by clearly showing the reversibility that gradually swallows freedoms and that rewards sectarianism and gregariousness.

The control panel we are proposing is only one of many possibilities. Its design is not imposed by any process of "quality control", and individual or collective participant-response activates its controls, keeping the system open and allowing its functions to be implemented and improved. The control panel was built and operated among many.

In the construction of this panel, we have basically followed three core ideas or lines of research: (a) disorientation (b) post-video surveillance (c) subjectivity and control.

(a) Disorientation

In *Technics and time. Disorientation,* Bernard Stiegler confronts us with the particular disorientation of an era subjected to the "industrialisation of memory", in which time devours space and where, consequently, the "cardinal points" don't exist.

Immersed in multimedia overexposure, with time and space as we know them abolished, the co-ordinates of our situation change considerably in the digital world. In the analogical world, we determine our fate in accordance with our interests, planning our own itinerary. But the networked digital world opens the main gate to disorientation, the one that leads where we would not have wished to go, or where we wouldn't have wanted to appear. In this situation, it's a good idea to determine the value of the course of our travel plans.

The consolidation of a certain body of knowledge is also a result of its production (digital technology is a mode of production as well as a storage method), which means that the production of digital mechanisms of disorientation as an end in itself is inherent in social and cultural hegemonic expressions. This positions us before a new sphere of ideological control. If we understand lack of access to imply exclusion, those in power can consider disorientation to be the highest degree of faithfulness to the system.

How can we confront induced disorientation in the expansionist policies of major corporations? How can we approach networked work that facilitates areas of freedom and criticism of the network itself? How can we increase the means that strengthen a well-informed and connected citizenry without risking cultural diversity?

Keywords: Network and Disorientation. Network and Control. Network and margins. Hacker. Sabotage. Camouflage. Infiltration. Open source software. Multinational corporations.

(b) Post video surveillance

Video surveillance cameras are already part of the streetscape. Their gradual introduction into public space has provoked friction between civil liberties and the "ideology of security". The war on terrorism is just a way of implementing a global police state and definitively establishing a society of control. Fear and panic are modern politics' two main arguments, and given this new scenario, the power of the media is much more complex than the tele-surveillance described by George Orwell in *1984*.

Artistic practices have dealt with all these situations either as an argument for critical reflection or by aesthetically sublimating them to adapt them to the arts institution's own system of control. Many exhibitions on the theme of surveillance have reviewed this pool of creative work, but we don't want this project to be a return to the visual tricks offered by closed circuit or a morbid fascination with telescopic sight, but rather

to have a bearing on their consequences and side effects.

Because in the margins or interstices that crop up where art meets social activism, other type of approaches take place. On the streets, these have led to groups uncovering and pointing out the presence of cameras, subverting their secret nature to denounce their (in many cases) illegality or alegality and their indiscriminate spying. Other more individual and reflective projects, based on militancy within visual media, maintain a position of surveillance of surveillance systems.

"Permanent pancinema", "News overexposure", Newtonian space versus Minkovskian space"... a series of approaches to this subject almost define video surveillance as a genre of video (1) and have to be re-categorised to include new practices of audiovisual divergence.

How have people opposed surveillance systems in factories, in cities, on the streets? Were they aware of its coercive nature, of subjection to this surveillance? Or do they accept it as something natural? In short, have there been insurrections against big brother's watchful eye? Is there any sense in prisoners taking control of the central watchtower?

Keywords: Video control. Video surveillance and public space. Video surveillance and activism. Security firms. The society of control. Counter surveillance. Anonymity. Privacy. Public streets. Legality and surveillance mechanisms.

(c) Subjectivity and control

Mass culture and advertising, either as fields with growing influence in the public sphere or as products of a sophisticated form of control, project ideal worlds that are the true capitalist utopia. These idealised worlds or virtual paradises are worlds of signs, without any concrete existence, able to transmit the idea that a totally stable subjectivity is possible, one that is never vulnerable or unstable and that is free from anguish and fragility (an idea of paradise very similar to Judaeo-Christian heavens) (2).

Citizens, transformed into consumers who are unceasingly penetrated by these idealised worlds, are always in a state of fragility because of a crisis in their cartography of difference (what I am, what I have, what I aspire to). This fragility is interpreted as feebleness, inferiority and, ultimately, exclusion (and self-exclusion). Without realising it, under the influence of incipient anxiety, consumers participate, with their subjective power, desire and anguish, as part of a fundamental work force constructing markets in the current phase of advanced capitalism.

The new forms of control operate out of very sophisticated fields: direct marketing, customer fidelity and banking services in the form of products are seductive elements, bait that depend on the restlessness and instability that comes from precarity (Suely

Rolnik talks about "luxury subjectivity" and "trash subjectivity"). Forms of control are deployed in spheres of relations, and they affect freedom of opinion, sexual identity, individual rights; affecting people's subjectivity and sensibility to the point that their attitude and presence in the community is reduced to what Virilio called the "democracy of emotion": "collective emotion, at once synchronized and globalized, the model for which could well be some kind of postpolitical tele-evangelism".

Keywords: Subjectivity and surveillance. Control and gender. Gender politics. Cognitariat. Power. Surveillance. Sex and Power. Collective creativity and surveillance. Television. Democracy. Religion. Struggle. Resistance. Local context. Micro-politics. Micro-resistances.

Coda

More than an exhibition or a book, *Control Panel* is a research process that used the interconnected work of the collectives behind it as a basis for generating texts and graphic materials, producing a series of audiovisual works and installations and publishing a wide variety of results on the net and in print.

This multiciplity of media and formats, which is characteristic of our work, is meant as a commitment to the creation of new communication spaces in the fields of art, culture and new media. A commitment that we see as inevitably involving free dissemination of knowledge.

So, the *Control Panel* remains active. Its controls are still accessible and it remains open to the possibility of developments and further exploration in the directions that have emerged, or in new communication channels.

This panel, "built and operated among many", was and continues to be an independent, creative initiative, as well as a collaborative experience, which has allowed us to confirm that collective work is still one of the best ways to make friends.

Notes

(1) Fundación Rodríguez, *La videovigilancia como género*
http://www.rdz-fundazioa.net/fundacionrdz/castellano/videovigilancia/html/menu.htm

(2) Some of the ideas in this section have been taken from an interview with Suely Rolnik in Mexico City, December 2005.