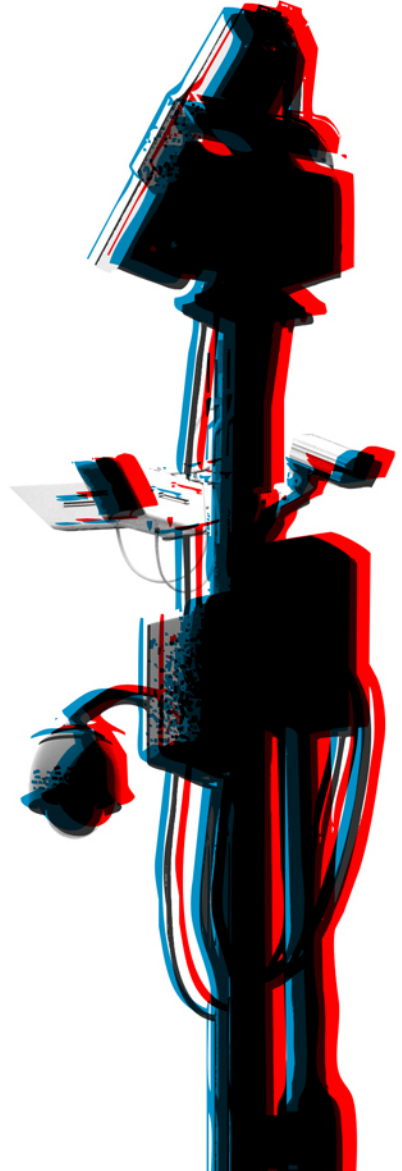


UN PROYECTO DE FUNDACIÓN RODRÍGUEZ + ZEMOS98

PANEL DE CONTROL

INTERRUPTORES CRÍTICOS

PARA UNA SOCIEDAD VIGILADA



ZEM
OS
98

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DIE RIESE, A FILM BY MICHAEL KLIER (AND AN ATTEMPT TO GIVE MEANING TO THE TERM "POST-VIDEO SURVEILLANCE")

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Abstract

Throughout the process of putting *Panel de Control* together, Michael Klier's movie *Der Riese* (The Giant, 1983) has served as an connecting element linking the project to earlier ones organised around the same theme. If, as Deleuze used to say, the crisis of the family, of education, the military, prisons - ultimately the crisis of civil society in general - hastens new forces of control that are replacing disciplinary forces, it seems logical to define a new stage for approaching an analysis of video surveillance. A huge bank of video monitors keeps the world under permanent observation. The changing of the guard in the armchair that presides this room full of monitors, as "Big Brother" hands his seat to the "Big Audience", is the storyline that runs through this film.

Keywords

Video surveillance, video control, vanguard, disciplinary space, experimental, perceptions, representation, narration, reception, viewer, perceiver, subjectivity, gaze, panopticon, synoptic, simulacrum.

In...

CTRL [SPACE], *Rhetorics of Surveillance*, from *Bentham to Big Brother*, organised by ZKM from late 2001 to early 2002, may be the most comprehensive exhibition yet on the issue of the social control exercised by video surveillance. This ambitious project curated by Thomas Y Levin brought together the most representative works in this area of investigation, through a roll call of guest artists that was impressive enough to legitimise the event.

<http://ctrlspace.zkm.de>

More than once, we've looked sidelong at this unavoidable a landmark while trying to come to grips with new, current perspectives on the phenomenon. But this sideways glance of ours, which was critical rather than distrustful, has not freed us from a question that has constantly hovered over *Panel de Control*, perhaps fixing its unfixed nature: To what extent is an exhibition a control system in itself?

We eventually accepted that this question would remain suspended over our mission and spur us on to work on aspects that were more about specific production of materials, about public space and additional activities, so that the idea of an exhibition gave way to that of a "project" (with one of its extensions being this publication). But even then, when we approached the exhibition side we resorted to some shared areas and "key" pieces of work that had been included in the ZKM exhibition, and one of these was Michael Klier's *Der Riese* (The Giant, 1983).

This is certainly not the place to analyse how and why the artists and works were selected, or to review the way the exhibition space was treated. But it seems appropriate to mention that Klier's movie was clearly a "hinge" element, connecting our exhibition to others that have been organised around similar themes (from our humble analysis and production resources), and that it was also immediately linked it to the usual "image" of video surveillance, an image that we could then set out to update or implement.

Along with Klier's work, the SCP (*Surveillance Camera Players*), an artists' collective that also took part in the German exhibition and were invited to participate in Sevilla, marked an interesting sequence in the process of getting to grips with the meaning of social video control in a critical way. This was an issue we wanted to make a contribution to and which, to a large extent, has inspired this text.

On...

So, the film *Der Riese* was included in the exhibition *CTRL [SPACE]*... at a moment in time when the breakdown of media was evidence that the very idea of exhibitions was breaking down. But even so, perhaps due to its

ambitiousness, the exhibition ended up reinforcing a certain “controlling impulse” over all creative activities that were outside the main line of research, with the resulting danger that the activities and projects would be subject to “aestheticisation”, operational paralysis, deactivation, and “museification” (something that happens particularly with SCP actions, as we’ll discuss below).

The tendency to include films in major international exhibitions in recent years probably shows that the socio-cultural aspects of research have been reinforced. But it can also be problematic in terms of the way they are received by audiences if there aren’t appropriate indications of how and where specific works fall within the context of the discourse and the way it is formalised. As José Luis Brea would say, “exhibition cinema” is not so much a development within the history of film (or video) as within the history of painting, and this is especially relevant here because viewing *Der Riese* requires particularly active reception-perception.

These kinds of considerations have led us to reflect on the exhibition format as a control mechanism, on its relevance or effectiveness in terms of different kinds of content, and even on the formulation of the exhibition, our very own doorstep.

--ooOoo--

In any case, Michael Klier’s 1983 film, with a duration of 81 minutes, is a strange and fantastic symphony that invents itself just behind the eyes of those watching it. The complex way in which this happens is exactly what makes it special – a difficult-to-classify gem and, to me, a landmark in audiovisual history if you take into account its radical character and the fine way it tunes into the “space-time” from which it emerged. Perhaps because of this quality, we decided to place this work at the centre of the project, as a conceptual focus, around which the exhibition’s three principal themes were organised (1).

Die Riese is filmed with surveillance cameras – footage from different recordings are gradually juxtaposed to suggest a series of narratives that intersect, intertwine and take us, the viewers, somewhere “new”. A place where the rules that govern the “viewer” are redefined. The film opens with an aeroplane landing at Berlin-Tegel airport, accompanied by powerful symphony orchestra music, and from there, stories multiply in a kind of opinion-free, televisual flow. A sailing boat on a lake, incidents on the street, pedestrians, people on the beach... A primitive artefact belonging to the Düsseldorf police composes portraits of prototypical criminal faces. Klier’s *The Giant* is the guardian over the door of The Hamburg mansion, gazing over transactions in a bank, patrolling the department stores, petrol stations and brothels of Berlin, observing the nervous inmate of a mental hospital as he is interviewed by his doctor while, incidentally, we are shown a mysterious

room in which a large bank of video monitors shows us the place from which Big Brother operates (although something seems to suggest an invitation to share this room).

The images are sometimes accompanied by ambient sound, but now and then they light up with meaning with a voluptuous mix of Wagner or Mahler, Rachmaninoff or Khachaturian. The music emphasises the film’s slippery structure, and the silence reaffirms the distance that Klier places on the events that unfold. But in reality we ourselves subjectively direct the movie, live and in real time, from the material we are given. There is no director, script or cameraman; there are no lighting effects or any other artifice beyond the camera’s robotised movement; black and white is mixed with colour and different textures, and there is no clear intentionality. Or maybe there is, but it will invariably be the one we want to see.

Off...

In the exhibition catalogue for *CTRL [SPACE] Rhetorics of Surveillance (2)*, James Hoberman introduces *Der Riese* with a text called *Science Fictions*. In this text, the author places the movie somewhere between the motorized tripod of Michael Snow’s *The Central Region* (1971), and Dziga Vertov’s kino-eye in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). It certainly shares a decidedly avant-garde approach, where the execution and the result can be called artistic challenges. From Snow’s film, from the analytical and structural experience provided by images of a remote landscape captured with a robotic “camera-device”, Klier’s film takes the “cold” distance from the subject of the filming. From Vertov’s film it takes the sense of commitment, that political notion that tries to be faithful to moving life, without intermediaries, an intention that is warmer, more familiar...

But it also seems necessary to mention a German precedent, Walter Ruttmann’s best known film, *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (Berlin: Die Symphonie der Großstadt, 1927). This is another experimental example in which the same city is filmed with a delicate flow, without a usual “documentary” storyline. It portrays everyday life in the German capital, which was also then being subjected to the overpowering rhythm of new technologies; a journey in time that makes us reflect on the evolution of the disciplinary state in the urban sphere.

--ooOoo--

But now that we have dealt with this referential thread, it seems necessary to approach *Der Riese* from a broader perspective that allows us to make connections that go further than video surveillance, in the areas where the gaze or “image-perception” are constructed. Because these are intellectual mechanisms, provided by the “vision machine”, which provoke a polluting haze in

our relationship with transmitted images.

According to Virilio's discussion of "technologies of perception and representation", this automation of perception doesn't just affect perception, but also the way it is processed (the place where mental images are formed and natural memory is consolidated) and therefore the way it is interpreted, that is, the very sense of reality. So we're dealing with a series of factors that can manipulate consciousness (as advertising and propaganda do) in which the projection of factual images (images that force the gaze and capture the attention) could be an effective strategy for "convincing people of anything".

The first stage of filmic representation is to set up an "image-perception". In this sense, *Film*, the Samuel Beckett movie directed by Alan Schneider in 1964, is a work entirely constructed around the maxim "to be is to be seen".

The relationship between this work and *Der Riese* could seem forced, but both films talk about cinema as a perceptual device and about our "mind space" as viewers or consumers when we watch films. In *Film* the "camera-eye" is a character in the scene, questioning the objectivity of what is seen. The main character, Buster Keaton, is scandalised by the idea of being seen and tries desperately to avoid that gaze. A struggle is set up between eye and eye. The perceived image loses its objectivity, the character and the "camera-eye" fail in their attempt to objectivise the observed. Buster Keaton knows he is seen, while in *Der Riese* none of these "seen" know they are. However, our "camera-eye" ends up subjectivising everything that happens so that in both cases, the machine-mediation determines a process of seeing that defines the work. We could say that subjectivity travels outwards from the interior in *Film* (the "camera-character" transmits the subjective gaze), while in *Der Riese* it turns inwards from the external (we subjectivise and "edit in-camera-eye" everything we see, integrating ourselves as though we were a "camera-character").

But these are films in as far as the audiovisual material that they are made of is presented to us in edited form, ordered. Santos Zunzunegui says this about Klier's film: "*Der Riese* operates as the site in which an impersonal, variable eye – empty of the idea of author and narrator – simply records a series of events that, through their contiguity – an electronic version of Kulechov's cinematic effect – work to generate what simply appears to be a story".

Given this, it is possible to imagine a kind of scales, where even the slightest influence to the way the images are recorded (the camera's mechanical autonomy) would increase the speculative charge in the editing, and where the fluctuations of the scale would lead us to construct more or less complex narratives, as though it were an automatic level in which all stories become

possible...

Out...

Bruce Nauman may have been one of the first artists to work on the implications of video surveillance. Visitors to his installation *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room* (1969) become actors, and their responses to this situation become the elements that constitute the film. *Live Taped Video Corridor* is another Nauman work in which the viewer finds himself in a long corridor with two monitors at the end, one on top of the other. In one he sees the empty corridor, in the other the viewer sees himself filmed from behind.

Dan Graham, in different versions of *Time Delay Room* (1974), and other video art pioneers, worked on similar experiences in which the kind of space-time perception brought about by closed circuits showed technology's ability to modify reality. But the closed-circuit mechanism was simply an extension of Foucault's "disciplinary space", a technological prosthesis that could explore control from a reproducible gaze able to invent and reinvent performances and installations.

If, as Deleuze said, the crisis of the family, of schools, the military, prisons – the crisis of civil society in general – hastens new forces of control that are replacing disciplinary ones (3), it seems logical to consider a new scene for analysing video surveillance. "Paul Virilio too is constantly analysing the ultrarapid forms of apparently free floating control that are taking over from the old disciplines at work within the time scales of closed systems", continues Deleuze.

In this scheme of things, we could consider that Klier's film (filmed a year before 1984) somehow anticipates this situation, in which the complexity of control provokes new approaches in response to surveillance. Our aim here isn't to try and identify the first evidence of this possible change (towards what we could call "post video surveillance"). Rather, we want to define a series of guidelines, with whatever reservations are necessary, that can help us to see a continuity of attempts to come to grips with video surveillance from a new phase, where the way in which video surveillance is used as creative material answers to concerns that combine perception, subjectivity and the simulacrum (in a global sphere), rather than the technological artificiality or mere speculation on issues of artistic "representation".

There are no lead actors in Klier's film. "In-dividuality is replaced by "dividuals", who are externalised, informatised and informatisable and move around in a virtual space", as Deleuze said. The profusion of public and private spaces that form the film's scenes ends up "delocalising" the plot, emphasising the blurring of control that is characteristic of our time. Video surveillance, in its advanced state, is now simply an

appendage to a system of control that has expanded into everyday life and all our transactions. Now, the fact of being seen in a public space is simply data to be processed, like that of being identified as a number: "The numerical language of control consists of figures that define or prohibit access to information" (4).

--ooOoo--

Video surveillance, which due to its panoptic nature has played a central role in control as a technology of power and was linked to a society of producers, now sees its coordinates change in favour of post-video surveillance, which acts in a society of consumers where power operates using the technology of seduction – the "synoptic" condition (5). This synoptic, where the many can look at a few (6) positions us back at the bank of monitors that Michael Klier shows in *Der Riese*. The exact moment when Big Brother gives up his seat to the Big Audience, defines this possible change in the norm, in which video surveillance becomes more elaborate and also more interiorised, that will permit new readings of video surveillance. This stage, in which a perceptive, discursive and representational form is overcome, makes us think of post-video surveillance as an evolved form of video surveillance control (7).

To be more specific, the actions of SCP (*Surveillance Camera Players*), who emerge from a social vindication that questions the legality of the video surveillance cameras that invade our streets and the way these images are used, use the medium itself in order to spread their critique. SCP actions map these cameras and use them as a platform to film their criticisms, as well as their performances, sketches and interventions (8). This practice in which video surveillance is also the vehicle for expressing social divergence on the issue, can be seen as an evolved form of the use of video surveillance which – perhaps deactivated through the effects of its re-formulation in the art world – continues to pose a political attitude in the face of the threat, rather than converting the threat into naive technological and/or artistic fascination (9).

The work of SVEN (*Surveillance Video Entertainment Network*) goes a bit further, steering the surveilling gaze towards the spectacular gaze that has been educated in pop culture, from an approach that could be called parody (10). SVEN is a system consisting of a surveillance camera and software that follows pedestrians from a van and detects their characteristics. This mechanism receives and processes the information in real-time, generating music and video and creating a video clip that envelops the passer-by. The idea is to satirize and question video surveillance, stressing the quality of the gaze, which is already inseparable from the connotations of the spectacle and the simulacrum.

These practices have emerged from the discernment of certain idea of post-video surveillance that account for a commitment to cultural and social divergence, and

to creativity as a method of dissent. Even though *The Giant (Der Riese)* is still watching us....

Notes

(1) As Francisco González (www.radarq.net), the architect in charge of the spatial distribution and set-up of the Panel de control exhibition, said, this work is "the exhibition's editorial piece". The exhibition, as defined in his proposal, is based on three core areas of investigation: disorientation, post-video surveillance and subjectivity and control.

(2) The catalogue of the exhibition *Ctrl [space] Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2002) is published by Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel.

(3) DELEUZE, GILLES, *Postdata sobre las sociedades de control* (1990)

(4) DELEUZE, GILLES, *Postdata sobre las sociedades de control* (1990)

(5) Eva Patricia Gil Rodríguez's doctorate thesis: *Simulacro, Subjetividad y Biopolítica; de Foucault a Baudrillard* explains this circumstance and the meaning of the simulacrum in societies of control, as well as the transformations of the relationships between power and subjectivity in the knowledge age.

(6) "The synoptic, where many have the possibility of looking at a few, transforms the spectacle into simulacrum, inverting Baudrillard's terms (in López Petit, 2003), given that these few invest us with the norms that transform us into subjectivities suitable for the consumer society. In this way, the simulacrum becomes the subjectivisation mechanism that leads us to place ourselves on the other side of the mirror in our society of the spectacle". (GIL RODRÍGUEZ, EVA PATRICIA, *Simulacro, Subjetividad y Biopolítica; de Foucault a Baudrillard*", Comunicación ene. 2nd Observatorio para la Cibersociedad Congress).

(7) Luis André's work *Kutxabeltza*, made in 1993 using the city of Bilbao's video surveillance and traffic control cameras, is similar to *Der Riese*, although the author made it before having seen Klier's film. This work, also released on CD Rom and as live presentation accompanied by music, is a magnificent portrait of the Basque city, in which political upheaval happens at the same time as changes to the city's physiognomy. A brilliant soundtrack by Mikel Abrego connects the images with the post-punk pulse of the Basque creative scene at the time. *Kutxabeltza* was also included in the Panel de Control exhibition (Seville, March 2007).

(8) Several SCP drawings, maps and photographs, and their video 1984 were included in Panel de control.

(9) In relation to this, Karmelo Bermejo's work *Vigilar al vigilante* and Xoan Anleo's *Dan Flavin nunca estuvo aquí* (2004), explains meta-control by short circuiting the surveillance of a disciplinary space such as a museum. In Bermejo's work, the guard at one of the Museo del Prado's galleries is monitored with a hidden camera, providing evidence of his unproductive work. Anleo's tracking of two visitors to the CGAC (Centro Galego de Arte Contemporáneo) locates this meta-control in the analysis of the attitudes of visitors to the art centre.

(10) The SVEN collective imparted a workshop, produced by ZEMOS98 and the CAAC (Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo) to coincide with the exhibition.